SECRET AVENGERS.

A ROMANCE.

Printed by J. Darling, Leadenhall Street, London.

Secret Avengers;

OR,

THE ROCK OF GLOTZDEN.

A ROMANCE.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

ANNE OF SWANSEA,

AUTHOR OF

CAMBRIAN PICTURES; SICILIAN MYSTERIES; CONVICTION, &c. &c.

Some innocents 'scape not the thunderbolt.
Melt Egypt into Nile! and kindly creatures
Turn all to serpents! SHAKESPEARE.

VOL. I.

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1815.

FÜRSTLICHE
BIBLIOTHEK
IN CORVEY.

TO

MISS SMITH,

OF THE

THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY-LANE,

IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF RECEIVED OBLIGATION,

THESE VOLUMES

ARE RESPECIFULLY INSCRIBED

BY THE

SINCERE ADMIRER OF HER VIRTUES AND HER TALENTS,

THE AUTHORESS.

Swansea, March 2, 1814.

SECRET AVENGERS.

CHAP. I.

Lie thou there, my soul!
Sleep, sleep upon it; image not the form
Of any dream but this, till time grows pregnant,
And thou canst wake to vengeance. BROOKE.

THE castle and domains of Ulric, count Dusseldorf, were rich and extensive, uniting in themselves all that could charm the admirer of sublime beauty, and satisfy the heart of ambition; but their possessor, after the death of his wife (who, with a masculine understanding, and strong intellectual attainments, had held an ascendancy over his principles, moral and religious, and kept aloof that gloomy melancholy which now hung with oppressive weight

upon his spirits), became unhappy in his rich possessions, and, sunk in sorrow, grew every day more superstitious and despondent. Ulric had been, unfortunately, the only son of an early widowed mother, and reared on the bosom of tenderness, luxury, and wealth, had never been suffered to acquire those mental resources which enable men to oppose and combat the depressing innovation of grief.

At this momentous period, the monk Wanstein, who was his confessor, and had recently been elevated to the rank of abbot of the Carthusian monastery in the vicinity of the Castle, took advantage of count Ulric's gloom to revive the almost forgotten remembrance of a *murder* he had committed in early youth. This *murder*, as the wily Wanstein denominated it, was, in reality, accident.

Count Ulric, in throwing a spear at a boar, missed his aim, and the weapon unhappily pierced the heart of his favourite attendant, Herman. Under the deceitful semblance of friendship, aided by the well-

assumed appearance of religious sanctity, and the pretence of devout zeal for his soul's welfare, the artful monk seldom left his victim, whom he persuaded the unappeased shade of Herman haunted the Castle; he affected to see and hold discourse with him; and obtained from the credulous and superstitious count enormous sums of gold, to exorcise the unquiet spirit, for the performance of masses, and for the deputing of pilgrims to the distant tombs of saints, to solicit their prayers for the repose of Herman's soul, and the relief of the deluded count's conscience, who, with a brain almost inflamed to insanity, and a heart abhorrent of the splendour of rank, and detesting all society, yielded submissive acquiescence to the opinions of the abbot, who had artfully spread a mesh round him, from which his mind had not energy to escape; and bequeathing the whole of his rich possessions to the Carthusian convent, he retired, with his son Sigesmar, to its melancholy cloister, resolving to devote the boy to the service of religion,

and the remainder of his own wretched days to contrition and prayer.

The abbot soon after sold the domain of Dusseldorf to his kinsman, the prince of Meiningen, who, fond of the pleasures of the chase, was pleased to possess an extensive forest, which spread its shadowy skirts to the left of the Castle, making a striking beauty in the magnificence of the scene. Report also said the prince was much addicted to gallantry, and had connived with, and abetted, the designs of the abbot on the unfortunate Ulric, being anxious to secure a retreat, where, from its distance from his own hereditary lands, he could, unsuspected, indulge in the society of his frail favourites. Be this matter as it may, the misguided count Ulric, believing it the command of Heaven, disposed of the birthright of his only son, and cut him off for ever from the possession of those highly-cultivated lands, which had, from time immemorial, been attached to the illustrious title of Dusseldorf; all that remained to the orphan Sigesmar

was that title, which the crafty abbot, long after count Ulric had sunk to the grave, endeavoured vainly to make him forget.

To the instructions of the monks in philosophy, in chemistry, in pharmacy, in the abstruse sciences, nay, even in religion, Sigesmar had ever been docile; and his penetrating and comprehensive mind had expanded, and completely mastered all the intricacies that render difficult and impede the progress of study. He had suffered the abbot to believe that he was satisfied in monastic seclusion, and would embrace the Carthusian order, though, in reality, nothing was more distant from the intention of Sigesmar, to whose aspiring soul the monotony of the cloister was wearisome, and the cant of the monks hateful.

He was now in his eighteenth year, and the coarse habit, the hard couch, and scanty meal, were continually contrasted by ideas of the splendour he might have moved in, but for the crafty abbot, against whom his heart nourished a most deadly hatred. His memory tenaciously clung to

the bright days of his infancy; he recollected the fond endearments and tender smiles of the countess his mother; the rich habiliments that formerly enfolded his limbs; the magnificent apartments of the Castle, and the numerous attendants that had surrounded his own person. Stretched under a dark pine, in the thickest shade of the forest, he would meditate on the credulity of his father, and execrate the craft of the abbot; and as the hollow wind moaned through the branches which canopied his head, he would fancy the spirits of his ancestors murmured their displeasure at his subjugation, and excited him to regain, by some extraordinary effort, that rank, of which superstition had deprived him.

After listening to the elaborate harangues of the monks, which, though heard with meek looks, and apparent resignation, never failed to rouse indignation, and excite a burning spirit of revenge, Sigesmar would fly to his narrow cell, and ruminate in solitude on the duplicity of the

abbot, who constantly pronounced eulogiums on count Ulric's wisdom and piety, in depriving his unoffending son of the possessions of his ancestors, and devoting him to monastic gloom.

As his eye, rolling in frenzy, glanced from the grated casement, and caught a view of the proud turrets of Dusseldorf Castle, he would dash his head against the bars, and in the bitter agony of regret, and annihilated hope, execrate the weak-minded Ulric—that unnatural parent, who had suffered monkish cunning to overcome the tender impulses of nature—whose superstitious imbecility had doomed an only son to immolation on the altar of fanaticism and hypocrisy—who had devoted a young and aspiring spirit to the cheerless society of monks, to the chilling atmosphere of a convent, where all the energies of feeling, the nobler principles of nature, wasted their powers in useless controversy, or slothful inactivity, and formal prayers, which, wanting the stimulus of circumstance to inspire devotion, were

destitute of the fervor which would render them acceptable to Heaven.

"But it shall not be!" exclaimed Sigesmar, as he revolved his destination; "their hypocrisy is unveiled to me; I am aware of their deceptions; I am in their toils, but I will break the subtle mesh; I will escape their machinations. Sigesmar, count Dusseldorf, will not wear a monkish cowl—another, and a mightier than I, banquets in the hall of my ancestors—the banners of a stranger wave on the battlements of my Castle; but the world is wide, and this muscular arm may rend from malicious fortune a domain as rich as that of which I am deprived; the swelling spirit of the injured Sigesmar will not long confine itself within the narrow limits of this hateful cloister."

Every hour increased the disgust of the youth, for every hour disclosed to him, that, under the sanctified garb of mortification, of abstinence, and pious resignation, the monks concealed all the baneful passions of lust, avarice, and ambition.

In his occasional visits to the neighbouring cabins, Sigesmar frequently heard himself mentioned, and always in terms of such commiseration, as added poignancy to his sense of the injury he had sustained, from the abbot's execrable influence over the impotent mind of his father.

Once in particular, having accompanied father Idostein, who went to receive the confession of a dying man, he overheard a conversation which was passing at the door of the cabin, between a woman, her daughter, and an old peasant, who, shaking his hoary locks, said, "Truly it is a pity that count Ulric bequeathed his domains to the Carthusians. Lack-a day! if the countess had lived, things would have gone different. By the mass, she would have taught father Wanstein—but there, I am talking like a fool, because it was her death that made count Ulric hate the Castle."

"His son, though," replied the young girl, "had no reason to hate it; if he has my notions, he wont have much fancy for

a greasy cowl; was I count Sigesmar, I should never see the turrets of the Castle without wishing my father had not been quite so pious."

"Eternal curses on his piety!" thought Sigesmar.

"His father was a superstitious fool," rejoined the man; "with all due respect to his rank and memory, he had but weak brains to let that crafty Wanstein persuade him to make his heir a monk: lack-a-day! I was his vassal, Theresa, and durst not have spoke my mind so freely in his day; but now he is food for worms, why, I may venture to say that the brain of count Ulric was certainly not right."

"Right!" echoed the woman, "no, no, Rolfo, every body believes he was mad. Truly, if his brain had been right, he would never have defrauded his only son, to give his substance to a parcel of idle, lying, canting—but there, Rolfo, a still tongue, you know, is always best; but, to speak truth, it was not a very princely action of the prince of Meiningen, to join the wick-

ed old abbot, his cousin, in cutting off the rights of the lawful heir. Poor count Sigesmar! they say he is to be a monk."

"He is worse than a fool, if he submits to it," said the young girl; "his father did enough, in selling his domains, without condemning him to such misery. Only look at the filthy habit—a pretty disguise, truly, for a young handsome man: if I was count Sigesmar——"

In extreme agitation he advanced beyond the door, and fixing his eyes on her face, said, in a tremulous tone, "If you were count Sigesmar, what would you do, to avoid such a destiny?"

Nothing daunted by the gaze of his brilliant eyes, or embarrassed by the abruptness of his question, she replied, "I would stab the abbot."

The eye of Sigesmar flashed fire, and his cheek glowed with the brightest suffusion of crimson; the old man started, and her mother repeatedly crossed herself.

Adella continued, "I would escape from the convent, though bolts of iron con-

fined me—I would be a soldier—a robber—any thing rather than a canting, dreaming monk."

"Hush, for the love of the Virgin!" said Theresa, her countenance pale with fear; "thy long tongue will bring down the vengeance of the abbot upon us.—Beseech you," addressing Sigesmar, "take no heed of her discourse; her wits are gone astray.—Adella, art thou not afraid to speak so profanely of the holy fathers?"

"She has nothing to apprehend," rejoined Sigesmar; "and it is likely she but expresses the sentiments of the unfortunate count Dusseldorf; alas, his is now an empty title; for those rich possessions which once gave it state and consequence, are become the right of another, and that title, at which the numerous vassals used to bow, will soon be forgotten."

"That will be the fault of Sigesmar," replied Adella; "with him—on his deeds, rest the immortality of the title. Were I count Sigesmar, I would dispute the right that had exiled me from my castle."

"What can a single arm effect?" said he, sighing heavily; "besides, the prince of Meiningen paid his money for the purchase; and where can the friendless Dusseldorf find gold to buy again the wide domain his father was persuaded to alienate?"

"Cunning then," replied Adella, "should stand in the place of Fortune, and supply all the luxuries her malice has snatched away. It would be glorious revenge to use the very weapons which have been employed to ruin him; and a triumph worthy count Sigesmar, to rise again by the means that have hurled him from rank and affluence."

There were chords in the swelling heart of Sigesmar that seemed to be in unison with the sentiments of Adella. Her manner was impressive, and the tone of her voice created a strange feeling he had never before experienced; as yet, her person had escaped his notice, but he now observed that she was tall, and in defiance of the coarse peasant's habit, evinced a

graceful superiority. Her face was beautiful, though strongly expressive of pride, and the desire of command. Her eyes, large, dark, and lustrous, gave light to a complexion inclined to olive; her long tresses, black and glossy as the wing of the raven, wantoned over a neck and bosom, which, for elegance of form, might have presented a model of youthful luxuriance to the statuary.

"Know you," said he, pressing her unreluctant hand, with all the energy of impetuous feeling, "know you not that you are addressing count Sigesmar—him whose fate you consider so unfortunate?"

For a moment, the eyes of Adella were rivetted on his face; but presently, with undaunted look, and unaltered accent, she answered, "No, count, I knew you not; but being informed, I shall not retract, for I spoke my sentiments."

The old peasant bent submissively to the son of him who had once been his lord; and the tears rolling down his furrowed cheeks, evinced the sorrow he felt

at his reverse of fortune, while Adella, waving her hand with the action of command, said, "Will weak repinings reinstate the count in his possessions? Peace, good Rolfo; women and babes, who have no other arms to use against oppression, shed tears." Then turning, with a lofty air, to Sigesmar, she resumed, "He who basely purchased your domains is gone to answer for his deeds; but Leopold, the reigning prince of Meiningen, is daily expected at the Castle. He is reputed generous; through him you may again aspire to fortune, unless you are content to wear a cowl, and waste your days ingloriously in cloistered gloom."

"Content!" repeated Sigesmar, his large eyes flashing sparks of indignant fire; "content! I would rather be the meanest soldier that holds a station in the German legions, than linger out my days in this abhorred seclusion. I will appeal to Meiningen—I will compel him to release me from the ignominious fetters that the

miscreant hands of fraud and superstition have forged for me."

The lightning smile that played like a vivid coruscation round the coral lips of Adella ran through the frame of Sigesmar with electric pleasure, and he passionately exclaimed, "Am I indeed so blest as to have one being interested for my fate? Adella, do you wish to see me divested of this hateful garb?"

"Most fervently," answered she.

"It is now more odious than ever," resumed Sigesmar, "and I will relinquish it or perish. The last of a noble race will not tamely sink into a dreaming monk. No, no; the last surviving son of a once illustrious house will not unresistingly give up the privilege of selecting his own path in life."

The mother of Adella, who had stood some time silently contemplating the Herculean figure of Sigesmar, now suddenly placed her finger on her lip, and turned a significant glance towards the cabin.

Sigesmar had only time to whisper, "I

will return hither alone, the first opportunity," for he perceived that father Idostein had left the sick-chamber, and was looking round for him.

Adella, taking the arm of old Rolfo, led him homeward; while the monk, having found Sigesmar seated under a tree near the cabin, they pursued the road to the convent.

Hitherto the thoughts of Sigesmar had never rested on woman. The maddening influence of female charms on the frame and senses of man had been a subject that had never obtruded on his ideas, which had been constantly employed in suggesting the means of returning to the world —on regaining his rights; but now the aspiring wishes of ambition, the allurements of rank, faded before the magic of beauty, the image of Adella; the splendor of her undaunted eye, the mazy ringlets of her ebon hair, the ripe luxuriance of her coral lips, were constantly before him; his breath grew short, and every nerve seemed flame; as he re-

membered the witchery of her smile, and the melody of her voice. Every graceful movement of her polished neck, every agile motion of her exquisitely-rounded limbs, dwelt in his imagination; and the meagre sallow visages of the monks, their uncouth figures, and harsh monotonous tones, became more disgusting, more discordant than ever.

As he rapidly paced the solitary cloisters of the monastery, where no sound met his ear, save the melancholy echo of his own steps, he meditated with deeper, darker feelings on his situation. In the injury his father had done him, all filial affection, all reverence was lost; and, in the wildness of despair, he poured on his memory the bitterest curses. The frenzy of his thoughts communicated flame to his body, and his throbbing temples and quickened pulses indicated an approaching fever. "Adella! beloved Adella!" continually murmured on the parched lip of Sigesmar. He cast his eager eyes round the gloomy edifice, as if expecting her; but when the figure of a

monk passed under the fretted arch that led to the chapel, he turned in abhorrence from the hated object, and his mind felt the sanguinary wish to extirpate them all.

"It is now," thought Sigesmar, "that I awake from my long trance of apathy; it is now only that I am sensible I have a soul. Enchanting woman! what sensations—what wishes hast thou inspired! How is it possible that man should voluntarily resign a happiness so far exceeding all other sources of felicity? Adella! adored Adella, to-morrow, at thy feet, will I confess thee my destiny. The soul of Sigesmar shall mingle with thine—the divine inspiration of thy voice shall marshal him to happiness or misery."

The bell of the convent now sounding on his ear, he was unwillingly reminded that the abbot had that night appointed a solemn mass for the repose of the soul of count Ulric. No tender recollections of paternal affection pressed sorrow on the heart of Sigesmar—no tear of fond regret dewed his eye; rage alone was the feeling

of his soul; and this sentiment swelled his bosom, inflamed his cheek, and gave rapidity to his steps.

It was the office of Sigesmar to attend the abbot when he celebrated mass, and he entered the chapel, to behold what he denominated a triumphant mockery of his injuries. The altar blazed with consecrated tapers—the deep-toned organ swelled the melancholy notes of the dirge; but no tear of sorrow for a departed parent trembled in the flaming eye of Sigesmar; his head was giddy—a suffocating sensation heaved his chest; and before he had stood a moment at the altar, the architectural grandeur of the chapel, the chaunt of the monks, the death of his father, his own injuries, every object in the wide world, had faded from his memory; all was forgotten; the fever had taken possession of his frame and faculties; and unable to support himself, he fell with violence on the marble steps of the altar.

He was instantly borne from the chapel, and a short space beheld the dark eyes of

Sigesmar emitting the blaze of fever, and his tongue uttering all the wild extravagances of delirium; but still the cause of his disorder never left his imagination; in his ravings he called perpetually on Adelia, and with the same breath denounced vengeance on the treacherous abbot, wildly demanded to be reinstated in his rank and possessions, and invited her to share his dignities.

The abbot, though high in power, heard the ravings of Sigesmar with dismay, and in the utmost trepidation, anticipated the hour when he would execute the horrible revenge he menaced. The abbot plainly discerned that love occupied the heart of the intended monk, and caused his disorder; that violently rushing on a bosom hitherto chilled by monastic severities, unaccustomed to female society, and used only to the jargon of learned controversy, its impetuous impulses had engendered the fever that was burning with maddening force in his scorched veins.

Father Idostein composed and adminis-

tered his medicines; and a thousand times the fear-stricken abbot was on the point of suggesting that it would be more merciful to send him to eternal rest, than to witness the prolongation of his sufferings. How easily might he be lulled to repose! but Sigesmar was beloved by the monk, and the abbot feared to hazard the development of his secret wishes to a man, the sincerity of whose piety he had no reason to suspect. For many days it was deemed necessary to bind Sigesmar to his pallet; for the fever had gained an height which threatened destruction to all who approached him, the alarming violence of which, father Idostein predicted, would, in a few hours, terminate in the release of his soul from his suffering body. Towards evening, his ravings ceased; and when the sun went down, he sunk into a heavy sleep, which the monk pronounced the precursor of death.

When the abbot was informed of this opinion, he hastened to the cell, and as he watched the faint breath, beheld the

pale face, and emaciated form of the late athletic Sigesmar, he inwardly rejoiced that approaching dissolution would for ever release him from the presence of a person, every glance of whose eye seemed to upbraid him with hypocrisy and treachery, and to demand the restitution of that rank and those possessions his arts had robbed him of.

At the hour father Idostein predicted he would draw his last breath, the monks assembled round the couch of Sigesmar, headed by the abbot, who sprinkled it with holy water, and touched his forehead and his lips with a cross, which the founder of the monastery had brought in pilgrimage from Jerusalem; they were preparing to chaunt the requiem for the dead, when a deep sigh, and a movement of the hand of the sufferer, convinced them that he still lived; and the disappointed abbot, with a countenance of rage, turned angrily towards father Idostein, and pointing to Sigesmar, asked, "Is this your skill?"

The good monk, overjoyed at the favourable crisis of the fever, did not perceive the malignancy couched in the question, and modestly answered, "Under Heaven, I trust it is; let us give thanks that he survives—the crisis of his disorder is past—Sigesmar will live to be grateful for the care bestowed on him."

The monk turned away to prepare a medicine for his patient, who, opening his eyes, feebly uttered the name of Adella. The abbot dismissed the monks who had attended to perform the last offices for Sigesmar; then approaching father Idostein, in an angry whisper said, "The fury of his disorder is not past; it rages as vehemently as ever; the infatuated boy is in love—if you indeed have skill in human maladies, cure him of this disease."

The monk shook his head, and meekly acknowledged his incapacity.

The disappointed abbot passed to his own apartment, meditating the means to remove Sigesmar to a better world.

A few days placed the recovery of the youth

beyond doubt, who no sooner felt able to leave his couch, than he was anxious to visit the cabin of Adella, which stood on the verge of the forest, in whose shade, could he sit with her, he fancied his health would be quite restored; for now, as in the paroxysms of his fever, she was present to his imagination. The weakness of his frame took nothing from the strong passion that filled his heart, over which the graceful, impressive peasant had gained uncontrollable sway; but the ravings of Sigesmar had revealed too plainly his sentiments respecting monastic life; he had expressed his detestation of the hypocritical arts that had been practised on his deluded father, the treachery that had plundered him of his right, so unequivocally, that the abbot trembled at the recollection of the energy with which the boy had vowed revenge. He now found that the resignation of Sigesmar was assumed; that his meek humility was a mask that concealed all the turbulent emotions of pride and

ambition, keenly edged with a sense of injury. Love being now added to these vehement passions, the abbot foresaw that he would not tamely submit to be buried in the obscurity of a cloister, stripped of rank and possessions, and for ever deprived of the endearments of her for whose society his heart panted with all the eagerness of youthful hope, straining to embrace novelty. To suffer him to wander about the domains of which he knew himself for ever barred the inheritance, and visit the cabins whose inhabitants had been his father's vassals, was only to irritate and inflame his mind; the abbot therefore gave orders that he should not pass the gates of the monastery.

The resolution of Sigesmar was formed; his heart meditated a deep revenge; he therefore bore this privation unmurmuring. "It is the mean privilege of little minds," said he mentally, "to resort to idle complaint. Souls of a superior cast imitate the awful calm that precedes the destructive hurricane, whose violent operations over-

whelm and annihilate; they waste not their powers in feeble unavailing debate; their energies are reserved for action."

In conformity to these sentiments, he composed his features, and modulated his voice to the low tone of submission. Shortly after, he was ordered into the presence of the abbot, where he listened with arms meekly crossed upon his breast, and eyes humbly bent on the pavement, to the lecture which harshly admonished him of the sinfulness of encouraging sensual inclinations. He was informed, that in order to prevent the possibility of his falling into temptation, his walks were restricted to the grounds appertaining to the monastery, till he had effected a complete victory over his vicious propensities, and resigning all worldly desires, had learned that only one love could, without guilt, possess the bosom of a youth designated for the holy service of the altar—namely, the love of him who had suffered death on the cross for the sins of man.

Sigesmar was prepared for this saintly

admonition; and determined to imitate the abbot's hypocrisy, he bowed with meek reverence, as he was told he might withdraw; respectfully addressing the abbot, he promised a strict observance of the penances enjoined him, and to labour with all his powers for that devotion which should render him worthy the favour of Heaven; then, requesting the prayers of the brotherhood for the restoration of his piety, he retired to the privacy of his cell, where, fearing to give vent to his boiling rage in words, he mentally renewed the vow of not letting vengeance slumber.

He then, with difficulty, climbed to the narrow casement, and found, that with persevering labour, he could remove the bars, and give himself liberty. All night Sigesmar, weak from recent illness, with no other assistant than a penknife, toiled to displace the impediments to his wishes; but the dawn found him successful; the bars no longer prevented him from leaning forward to ascertain the best method of

descent from the casement. A tall tree spread its huge limbs within the reach of his arms, and by grasping one of these, he was enabled to place his feet on the next bough, and so drop from branch to branch, till without danger he could leap to the earth.

With exulting emotions of joy he made the experiment, and hardly could he restrain his impatience, so ardently did he long to acquaint Adella with the subjugation of his heart; but already the grey of the morning glimmered in the east, and the hour of matin prayer would soon arrive. Hastily he climbed the tree, whose branches his enthusiastic fancy hallowed, and having regained his cell, he placed the bars in their former situation, and throwing himself on his hard pallet, sunk into a sleep so profound, that father Idostein missing him at matins, fearing a relapse, hastened to see what had prevented his attendance at the hour of prayer. The excessive fatigue Sigesmar had undergone during the night, had given a feverish flush

to his face, and his hands were hot from exertion. The good father, apprehending a return of the fever, commanded him not to rise, and forbade the monks entering his cell, pronouncing, that quiet and composure were, in his situation, absolutely necessary.

Again the abbot's hopes revived; the youth was not immortal, and his constitution, though naturally robust, must yield to repeated attacks; but while his wishes were digging his grave, the bosom of Sigesmar was fluttering with hope, and his imagination glowing with the brightest visions of anticipated pleasure. Anxiously he counted the tedious hours of day, and never did the dewy star of twilight, as it shed its tremulous rays on his casement, appear so bright and lovely. Towards midnight, father Idostein brought him a composing draught, which he affected to swallow; after which, the good monk, recommending him to the protection of the saints, left him to repose.

Sigesmar leaped from his couch, and

softly unclosing the door of his cell, listened to the heavy steps of the monks as they retired to rest; all being at length perfectly still, he removed the bars, and with a throbbing heart, descended from the casement. As he flew along the path that led to the verge of the forest, his eyes rested on the Castle. The windows were all illuminated. "The prince is arrived," sighed Sigesmar, "and while I, the rightful heir of these domains, glide like a robber under the shade of darkness, he revels in those apartments, from which infernal treachery has excluded me. If departed spirits are sensible of earthly transactions, Ulric, behold the misery thy weak credulity has occasioned—howl in repentant anguish over these domains, no longer subject to a Dusseldorf!"

The night was dark and damp, and the wind, with hoarse breath, shook the rattling branches of the trees under which he passed, while his hair streamed like a meteor on the blast; for in his impatience

to see Adella, Sigesmar had forgot that a covering for his head was necessary.

"What a fearful change is this!" said he; "in my infancy, a splendid equipage, a numerous train of servants, waited the pleasure of the heir of Dusseldorf; now, friendless, escaped from prison, alone I drag my feeble limbs, weary and sick, across that soil which once acknowledged me its future lord: but vengeance shall yet be mine; this hand shall grasp the throat of that hoary hypocrite; with the point of my dagger I will engrave on his heart the injuries of Sigesmar."

When he reached the cabin, contrary to his expectation, he found they were not retired to rest. Without waiting to knock, he raised the latch, and rushing forward, sunk at the feet of the young peasant, exclaiming, "I have risked my life to obtain this interview; Adella, I adore you."

This declaration, abruptly as it was made, met no repelling symptoms of displeasure; a smile of triumph played on her lips, and a proud consciousness of beauty gave a

brighter colour to the cheek of Adella, as she assisted to raise the weary Sigesmar to a seat.

She listened to his recital of sickness and suffering with complacency; then pointing to a man who had withdrawn to a corner of the cabin, she said, "That is my brother; he is in the service of the prince of Altenberg, who is now on a visit at the Castle. Gustrow, advance; this is Sigesmar, count Dusseldorf, whose misfortunes I have mentioned to you."

The eye of Sigesmar now fell on a countenance in which all the lines of villany and cunning were legibly delineated. He bowed with an air of proud servility, and said he should be happy in an opportunity of evincing his respect, and in aiding him to revenge the treachery that had wrested from him his rights.

Sigesmar wrung his hand with grateful emotion, for he felt that a friend, though far below him in rank, and moving in an humble sphere, was an invaluable treasure.

Theresa noticed the thin pale figure of

the count, and facetiously remarking that the coarse meagre fare of the convent was not likely to restore either his strength or his flesh, hastened to cover the table with such delicacies as had never met the sight of Sigesmar since his residence among the holy Carthusians. Adella selected the daintiest parts, and pressed him to eat, while Gustrow, presenting a goblet of rich Rhenish, said, "Come, count, drink to the success of the plan already formed in my brain."

Sigesmar raised the goblet to his lips, and as he drank, Gustrow thus explained his design:—"To-morrow I shall have an opportunity of conversing alone with the prince of Altenberg's valet; I will then represent the unfortunate situation of the count; from him it will quickly travel to his lord, who, being of a generous enthusiastic temper, will not fail to lay before his friend Leopold the injuries and injustice the count sustains, and his utter repugnance to monastic life."

Again Gustrow pressed the goblet on

Sigesmar, and continued to say, "Should the prince of Meiningen demand your emancipation from the convent, the abbot dare not refuse to give you up, for he holds his dignities and honours solely on the pleasure of the prince of Meiningen, who can as easily displace him as he can again raise you to affluence. To effect your liberation from the clutches of that old hypocrite must be our first step, and after that, we will devise the means of vengeance."

The expressions of Sigesmar were full of grateful acquiescence; and in conformity to the plan of Gustrow, he promised to remain tranquil till he should, in his own person, or through the medium of Adella, communicate the progress he made in his favour. Gustrow now took his leave, and Sigesmar was sensible of the necessity of tearing himself from Adella, and returning to his cell, lest, after matins, father Idostein should repair thither, and find it deserted.

"You will need support," said Adella; "I will go with you."

"And return alone?" said Sigesmar. "Oh! no, no; not for worlds."

"I have no fears," replied Adella; "nor do I know of any danger to apprehend."

"The rough winds, the damps of night," exclaimed the enamoured youth, "these are sufficient dangers."

"I am constantly in the habit of encountering them," rejoined Adella; "and if these are your only objections, I go with you; and for this reason, it will not be prudent for you to come, as you did to-night, to visit me; you might have met persons who would have considered it their interest to betray you to the abbot; you must wait," said she, with a bewitching smile, "till I invite you, before you again venture from your cell."

"And how, enchantress," said Sigesmar, "how am I, immured in a cloister, to receive your invitation?"

"I will explain to you as we go," replied Adella.

The arm of Sigesmar twined her waist; her perfumed breath, with hyacinthine

sweetness, fanned his cheek; under the concealing shade of night, he pressed his first kiss on a female lip. Intoxicated with pleasure, he forgot the danger he incurred, in being absent from his convent; and as he breathed on her bosom the warm vow of everlasting love, he would have braved every danger to remain always near her; but the more prudent Adella pointed out the folly of courting destruction, when a few days might bestow on them the freedom they wished, when, no longer restrained, they might obviate the necessity of separation.

Having reached the tree he was to climb, Sigesmar pointed out the casement, "And now," said he, covering her cheek with kisses, "now explain how I am to receive your invitation."

"When I can see you with safety," replied Adella, "you shall hear the notes of a lute beneath the casement; and now farewell; before that star sinks below the horizon, the matin bell will be rung.

Hasten to gain your cell; I shall wait here, to receive your adieu from the casement."

Reluctantly Sigesmar released her from his embrace, but his heart was buoyant with love and hope, and he nimbly ascended the tree, when stepping in at the casement, he whispered his tender adieus, and obtained the kiss he requested her to blow him. Sigesmar lingered at the casement till the figure of Adella was lost in distance; he then retired to his pallet, to repeat, in delicious dreams, his interview with Adella; to dote on her beauties, and renew his vow of never-ending love.

The cell of Sigesmar was, at early morning, visited by father Idostein, who, on finding his patient in a profound sleep, had stolen softly away, secretly praising the salutary effect of the composing medicine he had administered the preceding night.

When Sigesmar awoke, his pulse was more temperate; a gentle moisture had taken place of the dryness which had so long scorched his frame, and he breathed

with ease and freedom; which favourable symptoms the good father Idostein seriously attributed to the narcotic, that Sigesmar, instead of swallowing, had poured on the mat.

"Aye," said the monk, in a tone of exultation, "that most excellent medicine I invented—I have administered it with success to thousands, while very rare, indeed, have been the instances where it has failed—what a renovation, my son, has been wrought in your frame!"

"By love," thought Sigesmar, but he suffered the monk to give his narcotic the credit of his recovery, while he felt convinced that all the potions on earth would never have tranquillized his agitated feelings, or bestowed that health, which Adella's confession of reciprocal love had infused into his bosom. But though father Idostein rejoiced to see the bloom mantling on the cheek of Sigesmar, and the brilliant light again flashing from his dark eye, the abbot witnessed his recovery with a rage that cost him many a painful effort

to smother. Never would he remain a moment alone with him, for his conscience constantly upbraided him with the arts practised on the deluded Ulric; and he shrank in dismay from the affording an opportunity for that revenge he fancied Sigesmar secretly meditated. Even at the altar, he trembled at the remembrance of his guilt; but it produced no penitence, it prompted no wish to make restitution, but only suggested the idea of securing his own safety, by destroying him he had so deeply injured.

Every night Sigesmar listened at his casement, for the notes which were to invite him to the fascinating Adella, but no sound broke the awful silence of nature, save the wind, which agitated the branches of the tree beneath, and, to his distempered fancy, murmured disappointment. Weary with watching, the desponding youth would throw himself on his pallet in agony, exclaiming, "She has forgot me! Adella, the cruel, faithless Adella, has selected a lover on whom fortune

smiles; she has forgot me! Oh yes, she has abandoned the wretched Sigesmar to his evil destiny!"

He now, for many nights, forsook the casement altogether, and retired at the usual hour to his couch, where the misery of his mind kept him waking, or if he did sleep, generated harrassing visions, from which he woke feverish and unrefreshed. One night he dreamed that he heard himself called, and that, by the light of the moon, then nearly at the full, he beheld the face of a man at the casement. Suddenly he started from this dream, and a gentle tapping at that moment rousing his attention, he sprang from his pallet, and in reality beheld a man at the casement. Sigesmar hastily unclosed it, and saw Gustrow seated on a branch of the tree, who whispered an invitation from Adella.

"My life! my adored Adella!" said Sigesmar, "where is she?"

"She has pierced her foot with a

thorn, and cannot walk," said Gustrow, "but I wait to conduct you to her."

Sigesmar questioned no further. Gustrow came to conduct him to Adella—he languished to behold her—she had not forgot him, nor abandoned his interest—she was still faithful; and he eagerly followed the steps of Gustrow; but having gained the west front of the Castle, instead of pursuing the path that led to the cabin, his guide struck into the forest.

"Art thou in love, Gustrow?" said the count, laying his hand on his arm.

"No, by our lady," replied he, "I have done with that folly; but why the question?"

"Because," answered Sigesmar, "I should believe that nothing else could so bewilder the senses of a man as to make him forget the way to his parental abode."

"The cabin of Theresa, count," replied Gustrow, "is not safe from interruption; I lead you where your interview will be secure, and where Adella impatiently waits our arrival."

This answer satisfied Sigesmar, though he experienced no little surprise to see his guide enter a hollow tree, and producing from his bosom a glass tube, obtain from it in an instant a blue flame, with which he lit a candle; having carefully placed it in a small lanthorn, he began removing a heap of turf and dry leaves, when an iron ring appearing, he pulled it, and raised a trap-door, which disclosed to the wonder-struck eyes of Sigesmar a flight of narrow stone steps. A momentary dread—a suspicion of treachery seized his mind as he cast a glance into the gloom, of which he could perceive no termination. He was unarmed, and weak from recent indisposition: there was, however, no time for deliberating; Gustrow was already descending, and invited him to follow; if evil was intended him, it was now impossible to escape. While he yet hesitated, a light flashed from the bottom of the stairs. He beheld a man preparing to ascend, who, on perceiving Gustrow, said, "Oh, by the mass, well encountered; I was dis-

patched in search of you; where is the count? The fair Adella is full of fears and impatience."

Sigesmar attended not to Gustrow's reply—Adella was there expecting him, and he felt, to obtain the bliss of clasping her again to his heart, that he could brave death in its most terrific shape. He debated the point no longer, but followed his guide to a depth which appeared to be the centre of the earth. They now entered a vast cavern, the gloomy extent of which was dimly disclosed by a lamp suspended from an iron chain, that threw a feeble gleam on a narrow passage, down which, a few paces, he was led by Gustrow, who suddenly pushing open a door, a blaze of light burst on his view, so bright and dazzling, that for a few moments he was unable to distinguish the figures of several men who sat on a sort of throne, under an arch, which, glittering with the splendour of diamonds, reflected all the colours of the rainbow.

As Sigesmar advanced, his eyes became

inured to the brilliant glare, and he discovered that the persons to whom he was about to be introduced were all masked. Standing opposite the elevated seat, Gustrow thus addressed him:—"Count Sigesmar, I have conducted you hither to associate you with a band of brave men; but as no one becomes a member of this fraternity without the voluntary acquiescence of his own inclination, it remains for you either to be initiated into the mysteries of the order, which will at once admit you to all its privileges, or to take a solemn oath of secrecy as to what you have seen, and depart immediately."

"What is your order?" demanded Sigesmar.

"We denominate it the *Order of Retribution*," replied one of the men, rising with a dignified air, from his seat under the arch, "and ourselves *Secret Avengers*."

Sigesmar grasped the arm of Gustrow convulsively.

"We bind ourselves," continued the masked speaker, "to combat in the cause

of each other; to let no opportunity pass of taking vengeance for past injuries; pursuing our enemies to the remotest corner of the globe, and indemnifying ourselves from the stores of the affluent for the niggardness of fortune."

The concluding sentence fell like a thunderbolt on the ear of Sigesmar; his soul panted for revenge on his enemies, but to become a freebooter—he, the last of a noble house, this was degradation unthought of, from which his pride revolted; and the flash of indignant scorn flamed on his cheek, as several voices at once demanded his reply.

"I come not hither," said he, "to embark in such momentous enterprize—to encounter a proposal of such high import requires a mind prepared by reflection."

A murmur arose, and the members starting from their seats, drew forth their daggers, which were pointed at the breast of Sigesmar; but he who had spoke first, and appeared their chief, waved his hand, and again addressed the count, who, barehead-

ed, and unarmed, stood astonished, but not dismayed at their proceedings.

"Are you not," said the chief, "the only son of Ulric, count Dusseldorf?"

Sigesmar replied in the affirmative.

"Have you not, by craft and hypocrisy, been deprived of your possessions, of which nought remains to you but the unalienable title?"

"Alas, most true!" answered Sigesmar.

"And is not the monastic life ill suited to your inclinations—imposed upon you by a hoary villain, who has robbed you of those domains which alone render rank desirable?"

"Your information is correct," replied the count.

"Are you not, at this moment," resumed his interrogator, "the abbot's supposed prisoner? Are not your walks restricted to the precincts of the monastery?"

"All this is strictly true," replied Sigesmar; "I confess my situation is most irk-

some—my fortunes are desperate; still I would not rush precipitately—I would not place my fate beyond redemption—I would wish at least one night for deliberation."

Then turning to Gustrow, "Lead me," said he, "to Adella: why this duplicity? to her I understood you were conducting me."

"Count Sigesmar," replied the chief, "Adella, no doubt, awaits you with anxiety; but, acquainted with the terms which must admit you to her presence, she expects your acquiescence; a few instants would bring you to her arms; but never must you meet again, unless as a knight of the *Order of Retribution*; our oaths forbid the associating strangers with our females; you must either become a *Secret Avenger*, or resign Adella for ever; if you depart uninitiated, her death follows your next interview."

"Forbid it, Heaven!" exclaimed Sigesmar; "I hesitate no longer; to secure her life, to obtain her smiles, I will be any

thing; for without her society existence would be insupportable—proceed to my inauguration."

A crystal vase was now placed on the throne, and each member, baring his right arm, with the point of his dagger opened a vein, and suffered a few drops of blood to flow into the vase, out o which, kneeling, they all drank; their daggers, yet red with gore, they now held across the bosom of Sigesmar, and the oaths were administered—oaths of a tendency too horrible to stain this record; and Sigesmar, the devoted, the last of the counts of Dusseldorf, became the associate of robbers—a knight of the *Order of Retribution*, a *Secret Avenger*.

The masks were now withdrawn from the faces of the members, and Sigesmar beheld countenances of dark ferocity, which portrayed souls capable of forming and executing deeds of blood and horror. His hand was grasped by each of these villains; he was hailed their brother, was promised

speedy emancipation from monkish thraldom, and ample vengeance on all who had contributed to his injuries.

The frame of Sigesmar trembled; his brain reeled; for the dreadful oaths he had sworn yet rang their direful import on his ear. But the die was cast; his fate was decided; he was bound in a chain, from whose adamantine links there was no escape but by death; his destiny was fatally interwoven with a set of beings whose terrific operations, while they spread destruction and dismay through the first families of Germany, were so cunningly and secretly performed, that they seemed effected by supernatural power; and such was the terror excited, that various acts of atrocity were borne by the sufferers in silence, while the perpetrators were neither suspected nor inquired after.

Recovering, in some degree, from the horror which had stupified his faculties, Sigesmar pronounced the name of Adella. A door, artfully constructed, beyond the arch, opened into another part of the

cavern. Gustrow motioned the count to follow. The notes of a lute were heard, accompanied by a female voice. "It is Adella that sings," said Gustrow, as they entered a narrow part of the cavern, down which a light streamed from an open door. "That is the apartment of my sister," said he. "Adieu, count; I will return to conduct you to the monastery."

He retired, and Sigesmar flew forward. If the gloom of the outer cavern had contributed to damp and enervate his spirits, all that he now beheld appeared the work of magic—the magnificent realizing of the palace of a genii; the airy, yet splendid draperies, formed of silver tissue, embroidered with wreaths of roses—the costly mirrors, in massy silver frames—the exquisite paintings, mellowed by rays shed from innumerable lustres, which, while they illumined with a soft light this enchanting boudoir, diffused an exquisite odour, communicating a voluptuous languor congenial to the scene, by turns attracted the admiration of Sigesmar, who

now began to doubt his being in the bowels of the earth; his introduction to this fairy region he considered as a fearful dream; this was the delightful abode of some fair enchantress, not the mysterious residence of a savage horde of freebooters; for every adornment seemed devised to excite pleasure and promote indulgence.

A few notes struck from the lute recalled the wandering ideas of Sigesmar, and drew his attention to a canopied recess, where, surrounded by Arabian jessamine, and balm-dropping roses, sat Adella; a transparent white robe wrapped her graceful form, and the redundance of her glossy ringlets was confined by bands of pearl; her wounded foot, polished as alabaster, rested on a rose-coloured cushion, and one lovely arm hung carelessly over her lute. She stretched out the other towards him, and as he knelt before her, she fondly murmured, "Sigesmar, my own Sigesmar!"

"Yes, thine," repeated the youth, straining her in his arms; "thy Sigesmar

—thine eternally; for thy sake I have sworn to be a robber, an assassin. Think, Adella, how desperately I love, when, to obtain thee, I have degraded an ancient honourable name—leagued myself with rapine and murder."

The ruby lip of Adella silenced these reflections; she caught up her lute, and while he hung enamoured over her, warbled in strains of tasteful harmony—

"What is honour, what is fame,
Built on wild opinion's breath?
This can raise a villain's name,
This decree the worthy death.
Wouldst thou happiness attain,
To pleasure yield thy youthful breast;
All is bliss in Love's bright reign;
Love alone can make thee blest."

The feelings of Sigesmar confessed the magic of the siren. He listened to the melting cadences of her melodious voice—gazed as her ivory fingers lightly swept the strings, and was intoxicated with delirious passion; and when Gustrow returned to conduct him to the monastery, he

awoke as from a trance. The horrid *Order* of which he was a knight—his meditated revenge on the abbot, all was forgotten; he was lulled into ecstacy; and Gustrow had many times to repeat, that he would utterly defeat their schemes should his absence from his cell be discovered, before he could tear him from the fascinating Adella.

CHAP. II.

Ere the bat hath flown
His cloister'd flight—ere to black Hecate's summons,
The shardborn beetle, with his drowsy hums,
Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done
A deed of dreadful note. MACBETH.

During his hurried walk back to the convent, Sigesmar did not recover reflection; the transcendent beauty of Adella, her thousand fascinations, were thronging on his memory; the melting languor of her

dark expressive eye, the heaving of her polished bosom, the voluptuous caresses she had lavished on him, glowed upon his senses, and completely filled his ideas; nor had the tumult of his passions subsided when he attended matins. The bell that summoned him to prayer was indeed heard, but it was not till near the conclusion of the service, when the monks prepared to leave the chapel, that his thoughts recurred to the horrible sacrifice he had made to procure himself the guilty pleasure that was yet throbbing in his delirious fancy.

The hour of prayer had passed, but no piety, no devotion elevated the soul of Sigesmar; he experienced pangs, indeed, but they were not excited by holy repentance for the horrible oaths in which he had bound himself; he trembled not at having leagued himself with robbers—at having offended Heaven; yet his mind was tortured; his pride was deeply wounded in the debasing recollection, that he, the last of a long line of ancestry, distinguish-

ed for bravery and honour, had leagued himself with freebooters, and by this act stained, with indelible disgrace, an illustrious name. But the burning blush of shame was buried in the fierce flame of revenge. As the abbot passed him at the head of the monks, he laughed with demoniac exultation, for he remembered the promise of the *Secret Avengers*. He reflected that only a few short hours would elapse before he should glut his revenge by shedding his blood at the foot of the same altar where he had treacherously received the deluded Ulric's vows of renunciation.

To the retirement of his cell the idea of the dreadful association into which he had entered pursued him, and the accusing monitor within, his conscience, presented the scenes of vile degradation, of blood and horror, in which he must unavoidably engage: cold drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead; his nerves trembled, his hair seemed to erect itself upon his head, as the tremendous words, "I must

become a robber—a murderer," murmured from his lips.

At this terrific moment, the upbraiding shade of Ulric appeared to his distempered fancy, and, with a shadowy finger, seemed to point to a long dark futurity of misery, unless he made immediate confession of the crime he had committed, in entering the horrible *Order of Retribution*, and devoted his future life to repentance and religion.

The eyes of Sigesmar, with maniac glare, pursued the vision of his fancy round the narrow precincts of his cell; his breast heaved with convulsive emotion, as he pronounced, "Avaunt, illusive mockery! Comest thou to warn me from the perdition into which thy unnatural conduct plunged me? Howl, in eternal misery, over thy alienated lands; roam, ever restless, through those splendid halls from whence thy superstition, thy weak credulity has for ever banished me. Where is the rich inheritance which should have glittered o'er the path of honour, and led

me on to glory? Away, pale shadow! my fate is sealed by thee. Sigesmar, the son of the fanatic Ulric—the last of an illustrious house, his father has ordained to be a murderer."

He sank exhausted on his pallet; a thousand spears seemed darting through his brain, and his heart, swelling with agony, endured the sting of scorpions. His restless thoughts followed the prospect that futurity presented: it was gloomy, and full of horror. "But I shall not remain a cloistered monk," exclaimed he; "I shall have liberty to quit a domain where every object reminds me of my debasement—points out what I might have been, but for treachery and d——d hypocrisy; and thee, Adella—thee, adored one, I shall live in thy smiles, be sovereign of thy heart; thy melting tenderness will sooth my harrassed feelings, thy lessons of fortitude will instruct me to endure the destiny that compels—rest there, oh torturing memory, rest there—last night—be it for ever blotted from the page of time!—last

night—would I recall it? would I resign Adella? give up the ecstasy, the bliss of folding her to my bosom—of calling her mine—of hearing her vow to be faithful in danger, poverty, and death? Exquisite charmer! to gain thee, I have sold myself to infamy; for thee, Sigesmar is——"

The entrance of a lay-brother put an end to this soliloquy. He came to summon him to the refectory; to tell him it was the dinner hour.

"I have no appetite," said Sigesmar.

"Good lack, that is a pity," replied the brother; "though, to be sure, the repast is not very inviting, not over savory—a little oatmeal and water, and black bread."

"I am sick," resumed Sigesmar, "I have no wish for food."

"Well, see the difference," continued the brother, "I have such gnawings and pinchings in my stomach, that I wish continually for food. Oh, if you had seen the delicious white manchet, swimming in butter, the rich thick chocolate, the plate of delicate sliced ham, and the half-dozen

nice new-laid eggs that were carried into the abbot's apartment this morning, it would have given you an appetite, I warrant. The saints intercede for us, and obtain remission of our sinful desires," said the brother, crossing himself; "but my mouth watered, and I thought if I could feast on such delicious fare for a month, sister Catherine, the fat porteress of the White Nuns, would not call me weasel, bare-bones, and sallow-face. 'Mortify your sins,' says the abbot; 'banish your carnal appetites,' says father Adrian, whose paunch is as big as a tun, and gills as rosy as a turkey-cock. It is mortification enough to see fat capons and delicate sucking-pigs on the spit, and punishment sufficient for one's appetite to smell the savory steams that every day issue from the kitchen, and know that not so much as the licking of a plate must come to one's share; the saints can witness that my hourly mortifications have left me nothing but skin to cover my bones; and as to punishments, they are everlasting, for I am constantly condemn-

ed to see delicious repasts prepared for the abbot and his favourites, while I, alas! am only allowed to taste flesh once in a month, and obliged to keep a long Lent—then, as to drink, oh that I had a single glass of that sparkling Rhenish, of which a flask, nearly as big round as myself, was last night emptied by the abbot and father Adrian! how it would revive my spirits, and warm my stomach!—oh that I was father Adrian!"

"And why that wish, I pray?" said a voice, which sounded like thunder on the ear of the terrified brother. "Answer quickly, why that wish?" repeated father Adrian, whose ruby face, and portly rotundity, appeared to the eyes of the trembling brother, as he stood before him, more dreadful than the most ghostly apparition that credulity and superstition ever conjured up; "why, I ask," thundered he, "did you wish to be father Adrian?"

The brother meekly bowed, and cunningly answered, "That I might, like him,

be famous for piety, charity, and learning."

This well-timed flattery smoothed the frown that had gathered on his brow, and Adrian graciously replied, "I, alas! am a sinner, like yourself; but your pious wish shall not pass unremembered in my prayers. Go to the refectory."

The brother departed, happy in his dismission. Father Adrian then turning to Sigesmar, who lay with his face buried in his hands, unheeding all that had past, bade him rise, and follow instantly to the abbot's apartment.

"Satan," said he, turning up his little grey eyes, and trying to look devout, "Satan is busily working your destruction; the hot-headed prince of Meiningen demands your liberation from monastic duties; but mark, boy," continued he, in a whisper, "the brilliant career to which your sanguine wishes point may be obstructed; it may be shorter than you expect."

Sigesmar cast on him a look of indignant scorn. "Am not I," said he, mentally, "a *Secret Avenger?* shall I pardon or forget this menace?"

When they reached the abbot's apartment, they found him conversing with two gentlemen, whose rich habits proclaimed them superior in rank to others who attended at a distance; and though the abbot spoke with complacency and affability, yet it was apparent to those acquainted with his countenance that he was disconcerted and displeased.

Father Adrian having announced Sigesmar, a gentleman courteously advanced to meet him, and extending his hand, said, "If I mistake not, I address count Dusseldorf?"

Sigesmar bowed.

"If the friendship of the prince of Aitenberg can in any way serve you, I am here ready not only to profess, but act."

"Oh why," thought Sigesmar, "why came you not yesterday?"

"I thank your highness," replied he;

"the mandate of Ulric, my misguided father, has doomed me to the dull inactivity of a convent; my own inclination, abhorrent of the cloister, prompts to——"

"Liberty," resumed Altenberg, smiling: "my friend, the prince of Meiningen, sensible of the injustice that has been done you, and acquainted with your repugnance to monastic life, comes to demand you of his relation, the abbot."

He then led him towards the prince of Meiningen, who, after his introduction, said gaily, "Dusseldorf, I come to lead you from this gloomy edifice. I wonder not that a young man should prefer the pleasures of the world to a cloister; and had I sooner been acquainted with your wishes, I had not so long delayed your emancipation."

"I am most gratefully your debtor," replied Sigesmar; "your highness has been truly informed; I feel not the piety necessary for the discharge of a religious function; my aspiring spirit would shew itself in fields of warfare. I would not crouch

beneath adversity; I would, by my own deeds, obtain fame and fortune."

The prince of Meiningen gave Sigesmar a look of warm approbation; at the same time, turning to the abbot, he said, "Do you hear him?"

"Aye, kinsman," replied the abbot, "and tremble at his apostacy and ingratitude."

The crimson of indignation flashed over the cheek of Sigesmar, as he reiterated the word "ingratitude."

"In what," said he, "am I ungrateful? Did not your arts persuade my infatuated father to enrich, with my possessions, this monastery? Has not, from my infancy, my couch been hard, my food coarse, my raiment scanty? Talk you of ingratitude, you who have deprived me of my all? would you that I should kneel, and thank your charity that you suffer me to drag a miserable existence beneath these hated walls?"

"Audacious!" exclaimed the abbot; "this contumely deserves the bitterest anathema of the church."

He paused, made the sign of the cross, and reseated himself.

"Go in peace," said he, calmly; "I grieve for your errors, son; I have laboured to eradicate from your mind pride, sensuality, and ambition; but, alas! these weeds still flourish; yet I will not cease to pray for your conversion and welfare. You may depart; my honoured kinsman, the prince of Meiningen, demands you. Go in peace; from this moment you are emancipated from the jurisdiction of the Carthusians; but you may yet, deluded boy, repent having quitted this tranquil sanctuary for the turmoils of life."

"Never!" said Sigesmar, tearing off, impatiently, his cowl and cloak, and dashing them on the floor, "never! Off, ye saintly disguises—ye veilings of execrable hypocrisy! Sooner shall my naked body brave the inclemency of winter's fiercest tempest, than again be indebted to that deceitful garb. To your highness," continued he, addressing the prince of Meiningen, "I shall ever feel grateful for an

interposition that has snatched me from the commission of farther impiety. For is not dissimulation impiety? Every glance that shot from my eye was winged with disgust; and every prayer that issued from my lips was for freedom or annihilation."

"Profane wretch!" said the abbot, "begone, quit these sacred walls, and return no more, unless a penitent."

"I shall return," said Sigesmar; "at that altar where Ulric pronounced his vows, we shall meet again."

"If contrite, and in sorrow," replied the abbot, "the church refuses not to receive a penitent."

"We shall meet again," said Sigesmar, solemnly, "and may the sacrifice I then offer be accepted!"

"Amen!" replied the abbot, piously.

The prince of Meiningen having whispered an officer who stood near him, introduced him to Sigesmar by the name of count Wolmar, to whose particular attention he recommended him, then bade them proceed to the Castle.

In their way to the outer gate of the

monastery, they encountered father Idostein, to whom Sigesmar imparted the welcome tidings of his liberation. The good monk fervently blessed him, and prayed for his future happiness, with a sincerity of devotion that smote his heart with a pang of excruciating anguish; for he felt how widely the guilty transactions of the last night had separated him from happiness—so widely, that it seemed impossible they could ever meet.

"Virtue and happiness may unite," thought Sigesmar, "but vice and wretchedness are wedded for ever."

He wrung the hand of the monk, and his farewell was pronounced in a tone that convinced his companion that there was one at least among the Carthusians from whom he parted with regret.

When Sigesmar entered the Castle, he was led to an apartment that had been the favourite sitting-room of the countess of Dusseldorf; her picture, drawn in all the rich colouring of bloom and youthful beauty, and strongly characteristic of her

great mind, hung over a curious cabinet, that he well remembered to have been hers.

Sigesmar sank on his knees before it, exclaiming, "My mother! departed angel!"

He covered his face with his hands, and burst into tears—the first he had shed since childhood. They were tears of bitter recollection, for his mind dwelt not only on the tenderness he had experienced from her, but on the irreparable loss he had sustained, when death snatched away her whose intellectual resources, whose strong and elevated understanding, would have defeated the schemes of the designing Wanstein—strengthened with her energy the imbecility of his father—and led his steps from infancy to manhood, in the bright undeviating path of honour.

Count Wolmar considered his sorrow sacred; he suffered his feelings to have way, till Sigesmar, recollecting his presence, rose from his knees. He offered

no apology, for he read in the sympathizing countenance of Wolmar that it was unnecessary.

The prince of Meiningen's valet had orders to clothe him in the splendid regimental of an officer of the body guard, whom the prince constantly retained about his person in time of peace, and who composed the corps who followed him when he took the field. In this dress the handsome athletic figure of Sigesmar was displayed to advantage. As he passed the mirrors which made part of the decorations of the apartments, he could not help perceiving that Nature had stamped him with a form superior to the generality of men, that she had cast him in her most perfect mould. But the momentary pleasure afforded by the consciousness of personal superiority, was checked by the painful recollection of his midnight inauguration.

Shuddering, he averted his eyes from the mirror that reflected his figure, say-

ing, " Did Heaven fashion these limbs, form this towering person, to be a *Secret Avenger?* Oh, horrible!"

On the return of the prince of Meiningen, Sigesmar was sent for to his closet, where, in the presence of his friend Altenberg, he presented him with a colonel's commission, accompanied with a heavy purse of gold.

"I am happy, count Dusseldorf," said he, " that it is in my power to compensate, in a trifling degree, the injustice of both our fathers. I applaud your ambition—I admire the undaunted spirit with which you have expressed the sense you entertain of your injuries. The abbot is my relation, but I defend not, approve not, the piety that bestowed the domain of Dusseldorf on the Carthusians. Pursue all honourable occasions to distinguish your right, and this Castle and its appendages may yet acknowledge you their lord."

Penetrated, subdued, Sigesmar sank at

the feet of Leopold. The secret association into which he had rashly entered—the fascinations of the enchantress Adella, were all receding before the bright spirit of honour which flashed upon his soul; but his upraised eye caught the form of Gustrow, who was then entering to speak to the prince of Altenberg, and the moment which his better genius presented for his preservation, was wasted in thanks and professions of gratitude.

By secret signs, which he was taught on the night of his inauguration, and by which he was to know a knight of the *Order of Retribution*, meet him in what part of the globe he might, Gustrow gave him to understand that he was the bearer of a billet from Adella; and as they passed to the *salle à manger*, he gave him an opportunity to deliver it unnoticed.

Sigesmar thrust the paper into his bosom. Unluckily, as they sat at table, it fell on his plate.

Count Wolmar laughed, and pointing to

the paper, said, "You must indeed be fond of *billet-doux* to eat them."

Sigesmar caught up the *morceau* in confusion, protesting, with earnestness, that as yet he had not read it.

Count Wolmar gaily snatched it from his hand, and read—"Sigesmar, I expect you at nine; your late guide will again conduct you to the arms of her who exists but in the hope of meeting you, as much and as truly hers, as she is thine."

"No name," said he, looking disappointed; "this, I suspect, is some fair one, whose sins you kindly absolved, after having assisted her to commit them. Well, to confess truth, you saintly monks have precious opportunities of tempting and being tempted afforded them. When I marry, by the mass, I shall take special care not to admit a tall Herculean fellow, like Dusseldorf, as confessor to my family."

"There would certainly be great danger, in it, Wolmar," replied the prince of Mein-

ingen; "happily for fathers and husbands, the priestly habit covers but few such forms as our friend Dusseldorf's."

"It is true," said the prince of Altenberg; "and Nature, when she lavished on him such grand proportions, and rare lineaments, sealed him for no common purposes, designed him not for the corrupter of female chastity—for the disturber of domestic peace, but for the champion of his country—not to damp his powers in the slothful indolence of a cloister, but to exert his energies in removing oppression, in the great cause of glory—not to waste his strength in the lap of a Dalila, but to display his prowess in the cause of honour."

The painful emotions of Sigesmar nearly overpowered him. He might have been all the prince of Altenberg supposed, but his own impetuous passions had betrayed him to destruction, had shut him from the career of honour, and darkened the sun of glory for ever; yet, willing to palliate his vices, and fix the cause of his

dishonour on another, "It is Ulric," said he, mentally, "who has devoted me to infamy—my unnatural father has leagued me with robbers and murderers—it is Ulric who has snatched fame and glory from my grasp!"

The disorder of his thoughts communicated an air of confusion to his countenance; and the considerate Altenberg attributing his disorder to modesty, immediately changed the subject; he spoke of the aid they had promised to the baron Rosenheim, whose Castle was besieged by his illegitimate brother Gotha, and where the prince of Meiningen was called to the rescue of his sisters Frederica and Adelaide; the younger (Adelaide) contracted by her father, while yet an infant, to the baron Rosenheim, and with whom the unprincipled Gotha had fallen in love, and to gain possession of his brother's affianced bride had commenced this unnatural contest.

The next morning, at dawn of day, they were to begin their march towards Rosen-

heim, which was to be conducted with secrecy, as it was at midnight, in the hour of security, they purposed to surprise the unsuspecting foe, who, unprepared for the attack, would, th supposed, be easily subdued.

Their plans being settled, the order of the march arranged, and every one assigned his orders, the prince of Altenberg took the arm of Sigesmar, and led him to his apartment, where, closing the door, he presented him with a sword, the hilt of which was richly incased with diamonds. "Accept this," said he, "as a token of my friendship; as yet you are new to the world, and its usages; but I trust, nay, I am certain, whatever scenes you may in future be engaged in, you will never draw it in dishonourable combat."

Sigesmar would have spoke; his heart was on his lips; but Altenberg prevented reply, by continuing to say, "My friend Leopold is deeply interested in this contest; his lovely sisters, on a visit to the baroness Rosenheim, are besieged in her

Castle, with no other defenders than her gallant son and the domestics; for Gotha, encamped beneath the walls, has cut off all access, and the vassals, unable to afford assistance, behold their lord and his illustrious guests in danger either of perishing by famine, or yielding their rights to a monster who owns no law but his licentious will. I too, count Dusseldorf, am anxiously impatient for our march; Rosenheim Castle contains the dear object of my tenderest love, Frederica of Meiningen, my affianced bride. Judge then, if your heart has ever felt the thrilling power of beauty, if it has ever melted with the fond emotions of affection, judge how I pant to rescue this adored one from such a scene of peril. Only two nights since we learned the state of Rosenheim, from an attached domestic, who, at the imminent hazard of his life, passed in disguise through Gotha's camp."

"And in the midst of such distress, when his mind was agitated for the fate of his sisters, did the princely Meiningen bestow

a thought on me—snatch from his own important and momentous affairs time to liberate the wretched, unworthy Sigesmar? Oh, noble Altenberg! I would fain unburthen the feelings of my soul—I would disclose——"

Again the obtrusive Gustrow checked the disclosure he was about to make; he came by appointment to receive the commands of the prince of Altenberg, to whom he was master of the horse.

"Is not this man my evil genius?" thought Sigesmar; "most surely yes; and dark and accursed was the hour in which I first encountered him; he is possessed of superhuman power—an agent of the grand destroyer, who, though distant from my sight, reads my most secret thoughts, who, when a pious purpose rises in my soul, appears to stifle and prevent its issuing from my lips."

There was no more an opportunity of renewing the conversation the entrance of Gustrow had interrupted; they were summoned to the presence of Leopold; with

him they went to view the stables, and Sigesmar was presented with a barb, which, for fleetness and symmetry, stood unrivalled; at the same time the prince informed him that his valet had received orders to provide him with all proper necessaries. He forbade the acknowledgments of Sigesmar, adding, "Count, if you consider yourself obliged, be your gratitude shewn to-morrow—in the camp of Gotha I will expect your thanks."

The prince of Meiningen then recommended to his officers their retiring early to rest, observing, "We must be on the alert, to commence our march with the first dawn of day."

They then separated, and Sigesmar being shewn to his chamber, remained some time in reflection on the past, and conjectures on the future: "How many strange occurrences," said he, "have taken place since yesterday's sun arose! I am no longer a cloistered slave, subject to the imperious will of the treacherous abbot." As his eyes surveyed the splendid furni-

ture of the chamber, he sighed heavily. "Again," continued he, "I am in the castle of my ancestors; but how? alas! as a dependant, not as its rightful lord. Those who beheld the smiling happy days of my infancy, when a fond mother watched over me with tender solicitude, oh! could they suppose I should become a dependant in the habitation of my ancestors —could they believe that Sigesmar, count Dusseldorf, would league with freebooters, with assassins! Oh love! what tyranny is thine! by thy power I am thus subjected, thus debased!"

The bewitching form of Adella now rushed radiant in beauty on his imagination, and he remembered her assignation with all the anxious impatience of expectancy; but where was Gustrow, who was to conduct him to her presence? Would he now, as before, understand his thoughts, and come to aid his wish, or must he go forth and seek him?

While he considered, with no little perplexity, on the means of passing the gates

unobserved and unquestioned, a noise like the withdrawing a bolt in the recess where his bed stood, attracted his attention; presently he saw a pannel slide back, and to his astonishment, Gustrow stood before him.

"Can this being actually know my thoughts? if so, he is not mortal man like me, but a devil, and my perdition's certain."

This passed in the mind of Sigesmar, as he wildly gazed on the dark figure of Gustrow, whose disguise not a little added to his native ugliness; "I was devising," said Sigesmar, "the means of seeing you."

"I knew it," replied Gustrow, "and came to you the moment a favourable opportunity presented. But haste; count, we are expected at the cavern; there is much to perform before we set forward on the march to Rosenheim."

He then covered him with a dark cloak, and presented him with a visor, exactly resembling those worn by the *Secret Avengers*. He then turned into the cavity from

whence he had emerged, and beckoned Sigesmar to follow. By the lamp Gustrow had left burning, he found himself in a passage which wound between the walls.

"This passage," said his guide, in a low whisper, "communicates with most of the apartments of the Castle, to which entrance is obtained by similar springs to that I just now closed on your chamber, and no doubt was designed for concealment in time of war or other danger."

He now opened a second pannel, and a flight of steps disclosed an entrance to the vaults under the Castle. "This astonishing being," thought Sigesmar, "is acquainted with all the secret windings and outlets of my paternal abode, while I, its alienated heir, follow his footsteps like a stranger, in awe and wonder. Ulric! cruel, unnatural Ulric! thy unpardonable weakness has made thy son a stranger in the Castle of Dusseldorf."

The vaults were low, close, and damp, and exhaled a mildewed stench that almost suffocated the count, who was actually

dragged along by his guide, who, accustomed to the unwholesome atmosphere, felt but little affected. Soon, however, a fresh breeze revived the oppressed lungs of Sigesmar, and he breathed more freely, as they advanced along a winding passage, at the extremity of which a narrow grated door presented itself. Gustrow pushed it open, and Sigesmar found himself in the forest, not many paces from the tree in whose trunk was concealed the entrance to the subterraneous dwelling of the *Secret Avengers.*

A momentary pang smote the heart of Sigesmar, but love overcame compunction; he followed Gustrow, with eager impatience, to the bottom of the steps, where he was received into the embrace of Adella, who, habited like an oriental queen, led him to that fairy bower where she had before entranced his senses, and subjugated his reason with the melody of her voice, and the witchery of her beauty.

Adella gazed on his fine form, as he cast off the disguise, with expressions of

rapturous admiration; and in the glowing language of love, she deified the wretched mortal, from whose mind every principle of virtue was rapidly receding. All the seductions of flattery, mingled with voluptuous endearments, again assailed his heart; and again at her feet he renewed the oath, that to secure the possession of her beauty, to reign in her affection, he would, unmurmuring, become a robber, an assassin.

"But oh, Adella," said he, "should the moment arrive when I no longer shall enjoy my present happiness—when you shall change, when another shall possess——"

"Peace," said the siren, twining her arms round his neck; "peace, I entreat you; sooner shall the order of nature be reversed than I change. I am thine, faithfully, and for ever thine."

Sigesmar loved, and believed; for the human heart easily yields credence to what it wishes; he strained her to his heart, and all was forgotten but the raptures of the present hour. From this trance of delight he was at length awakened by the

unwelcome entrance of Gustrow, who came to lead him to the hall, where the members were assembled, and waiting his presence.

Adella held him to her bosom; she was informed of the intended expedition to Rosenheim, and her tears of tender apprehension dewed his cheek, and fell on his neck. "My soul's love, you go to fight," said Adella; "oh, if you should fall!"

"Pray Heaven I may!" thought Sigesmar, again roused to reflection; "I shall die a death of honour, and the tears of beauty, of her I adore, will embalm my memory."

"What shall console me for your loss?" continued Adella.

Gustrow burst into a loud laugh, and replied, "Another lover, to be sure. Women but seldom die of grief; when death or accident takes off one lover, they wisely suffer themselves to be consoled by another. I remember the loves of Sternheim and Minna; she carried a dagger constantly in her bosom, with which she swore to

dispatch herself, should any mischance deprive Sternheim of life. However, when his corpse was laid before her, she observed, that grieving for the dead was folly, and the next day allowed Ernolf to comfort her."

"Listen not," adored Sigesmar, resumed Adella, "listen not to the calumnies of this vile scoffer, who never having felt love, knows not how to credit its heroism or constancy. Thy Adella, learning thy death, could not survive thee."

Again her tears fell in torrents, and a second messenger was dispatched from the hall, before the infatuated Sigesmar could resolve to tear himself from the embrace of the enchantress, who sank, fainting, from his arms.

When he entered the hall, the members, to the number of sixteen, all arose, and each, in turn, extended his hand, to grasp that of the count, whose shuddering nerves recoiled in horror from their touch.

This ceremony past, the chief, Ernolf, thus addressed him:—

"Count Dusseldorf, the knights of the *Order of Retribution*, with united voice congratulate you on your happy emancipation from monkish fetters, which has been effected by their means. As friends and brothers, they present you with this dagger, to revenge, with your own hand, your injuries on your enemies, and trust that no weak compassion, no religious scruples, will deter you from sheathing it in the heart of the hypocritical monk Wanstein, whose hoarded treasures will, before the rising of to-morrow's sun, be added to our stores. On, count! to the monastery; we are ready to aid the work of vengeance."

In an instant every man grasped his dagger, and, "Lead on, count," sounded from every mouth.

Sigesmar stood aghast, almost congealed to stone; that his heart should nourish a desire to annihilate the being who had basely bereaved him of his possessions, whose treachery had driven him to despe-

ration, was not wonderful; but that they, whom he had never injured, strangers even to his person, should thirst for his blood, was horrible; his nature was shocked; and as his eyes wandered over the ferocious group, his blood chilled, and his frame shivered with horror, for he fancied them an assembly of fiends—not men.

"What means this silence—this chilly hesitation—this abstraction, at a moment when we wait your will?" demanded the chief.

Sigesmar started, and in horrid accents, asked, "What do you purpose?"

"That you shall drag the abbot from his luxurious couch of down," answered Ernolf, "and with his blood wash the altar his vices profane."

"For this I am destined!" said Sigesmar: "angels and saints have heard me swear to stab him to the heart! then shall I avenge the credulity of Ulric, and the Carthusians may enjoy the wealth."

"No, by the mass," interrupted Gus-

trow, "then should we encounter danger without profit—that is not according to the rules by which we are regulated."

"What mean you?" asked Sigesmar.

"You," resumed the chief, "having disposed of the abbot, we shall collect the treasures of the convent as our right; silver saints, and golden censers, no doubt, a large account; then making fast the gates, set fire to the monastery, leaving the holy fathers within, to enjoy a blessed martyrdom."

"One, only one," said Sigesmar, gasping for utterance, "I would exempt from this horrid doom, the worthy father Idostein; he who watched me with parental affection, when stretched on a bed of sickness, to whose benevolent care I owe my existence—he, whose charity extends to all mankind—let me entreat you spare him."

"Your boon is full of danger to the fraternity; his preservation may lead to discoveries that may involve us all. Your

request," repeated Ernolf, "is full of danger——"

"And cannot be granted," said the members, with one voice.

"Cannot!" repeated Sigesmar; "hear then," tearing open his vest, "bury your daggers here. I were a monster, sunk beneath perdition, lost beyond redeeming grace, could I consent to the base ingratitude of sacrificing him—the patient instructor of my wayward youth—the kind consoler of my sorrows—the gentle friend, whose hand smoothed my uneasy pillow in sickness—whose skill snatched me from the yawning grave—nay, dispatch me if you will; I fear not death, but never, with my accordance, shall Idostein perish. When I became a member of your *Order*, I swore to avenge myself on enemies, not to murder friends."

A consultation was now held among the members, at a distance from the count, who stood, resolved to die, rather than sacrifice the monk, whose piety his heart respected, though it did not imitate.

At length his awful suspense was ended, by the chief informing him, that his wish respecting the monk would be complied with on certain conditions.

"Name them," replied Sigesmar.

"At this time," replied Ernolf, "we have no member who understands surgery; if Idostein consents to take upon him this department, and swears to spend his days in this dwelling, never, on any pretence or occasion, quitting it, his life will be spared."

The conditions were not such as Sigesmar approved; as yet his mind was not grown callous; his conscience whispered, that the sight of a man whose precepts and practice were holy, would be a perpetual reproach to his vices; but at any rate, his life would be spared, and this was the only alternative between him and martyrdom.

Sigesmar would fain have repeated his adieux to Adella, but this was peremptorily refused; and with a soul filled with anguish, and a brain wrought to desperation,

he set forward with the band for the monastery.

Sigesmar was the first to enter, and leading the way to the cell of father Idostein, they found him sunk in the sleep of virtuous security; his rosary and missal lay beside him. "Oh!" thought Sigesmar, "had all the Carthusians been like thee, I had not been fated to disturb thy slumbers —I had not been a *Secret Avenger!*"

As the torch carried by one of the villains glared on the monk's face, he suddenly awoke, and his eyes falling on a group of masked men, each brandishing a dagger, he started from his pillow, and fearfully exclaimed, "the Father of Heaven preserve me! what seek you? what are your intents?"

Sigesmar advanced, and removing the visor from his face, said, "We seek retribution—our intents are vengeance, but against you, holy father, we meditate no ill—arise quickly, and accompany these my friends, who will lead you to a place of safety."

"Sigesmar! my son!" replied the old man, gazing wildly on him, "vengeance against whom?"

"The treacherous deceitful abbot—that hypocritical, saintly robber, Wanstein," answered Sigesmar, "who profaned the sacred name of Heaven, to plunder me of my patrimony."

"Leave to Heaven his punishment," said the monk; "if he has sinned, the Eternal will judge and punish, according to the measure of his guilt; because you conceive yourself injured, be not criminal. Retire, my son; take with you these misguided men, who will one day be convinced, that blood shed in revenge will sink their souls in perdition. Go, Sigesmar; I will consider this meeting but as a frightful dream; it shall fade unmentioned from my remembrance. Go, confess thy sins; humble thyself before thy Maker, and he in his own good time will avenge thee of those who have done thee wrong."

"Canting hypocrite! dreaming do-

tard!" burst from the lips of the chief, "either, on the instant, decide to go with us, or die."

The monk rose from his pallet. "Whither," said he, "would you lead me?"

"To a place," replied Gustrow, "where penance, abstinence, and mortification, are only jested at; where delicious viands, rich wines, and a soft couch await you."

"And for these enjoyments, what expect you on my part?" asked father Idostein.

"That you shall dress the wounds we receive in procuring you peace and plenty," answered Ernolf; "that you swear to keep our mysteries sacred, and never wander from our dwelling."

The monk addressed himself to Sigesmar: "This morning you informed me, that the prince of Meiningen had claimed you from the abbot, and I returned Heaven thanks, because I knew your heart was not formed for the calm seclusion of monastic life; yet still I thought your

principles were noble, and I trusted, that under such protection, you would rise to fame and honour."

Sigesmar uttered a deep groan.

"Why waste we the hour," said one of the members, "which should be employed in collecting the riches of the convent? either let him at once agree to go with us, or stab him."

"Never!" said the monk, falling at the foot of a crucifix that fronted his pallet, "never will I voluntarily quit these sacred walls, to associate myself with avowed robbers and assassins; here, in religious duties, the greatest part of my life has been spent; here, if it pleases Heaven, will I die, unpolluted with witnessing, or being accessory to, deeds of guilt: yet be advised; resign your sacrilegious intent; depart, and obtain Heaven's grace and pardon by repentance."

A noise in the gallery, into which the cell opened, drew the attention of Gustrow, who seizing the arm of the count, drew him forth, to learn the cause.

A monk returning from performing penance in the chapel had seen a light stream from under the door of father Idostein's cell. This being an unusual circumstance, prompted by curiosity, he had stopped to listen; and filled with consternation at what he overheard, was hastening to ring the alarm-bell, which, in time of danger, called the guards from the Castle, and summoned the neighbouring peasantry to the assistance of the monks, the foot of the unfortunate wretch had slipped, and his fall was the noise that alarmed Gustrow, whose dagger, instantly plunged in his throat, set him free from further penance, and sent him to eternal rest. The last groan of the murdered monk was uttered at the feet of the horrorized Sigesmar, who, as he held the torch to the face of the dying man, discovered it was one who, during his recent illness, had performed for him many friendly offices.

Gustrow forcibly dragged him from the body, over which he was pouring unavailing lamentations, and again they entered

the cell, where seeing a poniard raised against the breast of father Idostein, he rushed between him and the stroke.

"I swear," exclaimed he, "by the blood of him who died upon the cross, that through my body only shall peril reach this holy man."

"Through thee, then, he meets death," replied Ernolf, aiming a blow with the poniard at the count; but the bosom of the monk received the stroke, for he had suddenly started forward; and the blow designed for Sigesmar wafted him from a scene of blood and horror to realms of eternal felicity.

As the arm of Sigesmar supported his head, he turned his dying eyes upon his face: "Unhappy youth," said he, "throw thyself on the mercy of the church; confess thyself, and be absolved. May Heaven pardon thee! for if this my last counsel fail to move thee to repentance, it is sufficient punishment to live in guilt and infamy in this world."

With these words the last breath of father Idostein issued from his lips.

Sigesmar cast a look of unutterable anguish on the face of the monk, disfigured with blood; then starting from the earth, on which he had knelt to support him, wildly exclaimed, "Now dispatch me!"

"No," replied the chief, deliberately wiping his poniard; "with the death of the monk our contest is at an end; I could not persuade the old obstinate to prefer ease and plenty to penance and starvation; but his scruples are all silenced; he is dead. and there's an end."

"Yes," said Sigesmar, "he is gone to blessedness and peace; but the end," sighing heavily, "oh, who shall tell the end of Dusseldorf!"

"It is time we made an end of this useless parley," said Gustrow, "before the day begins—now for the abbot."

"Aye," rejoined Sigesmar, grasping his dagger with frantic gesture, "the abbot, he is the d——d cause of this catastrophe.

Lamented Idostein, farewell! neither here, nor in the world to come, I fear me shall we ever meet again; but the abbot, he who plunges me in this terrific gulf, his blood will I shed without remorse—his dying agonies will I enjoy."

He then rushed forward, followed by the chief and part of the members, while the rest dispersed themselves to secure the monks in their cells, and plunder the convent of its riches. Bursting open the apartment of the abbot, they found him and father Adrian not yet risen from the supper-table, which was covered with rich wines, confectionary, and fruit.

"Behold," said Sigesmar, advancing, and standing opposite the terrified abbot, "behold how the rich possessions of the fanatic Ulric are devoured; this hoary hypocrite, with saintly seeming, preaches to his lean, cadaverous brethren, the heinous sin of gluttony, the damning crime of drunkenness, yet see the luxuries in which he wallows; the monks beneath his righteous rule have every day a scanty portion

of black bread, a few cresses, or a handful of figs allowed them, of which they are told to eat sparingly, and mortify their appetites; yet his table groans with delicacies, for which the four quarters of the globe are ransacked."

The trembling abbot saw the hour of retribution, and listened in silent horror to the upbraidings of Sigesmar; while father Adrian, endeavouring at composure, demanded the meaning of their obtrusive visit, and reprobated the insolence of Sigesmar's speech.

"Silence, thou fleshy mountain," said Ernolf, seizing a flask; "we come not here to listen to thy brawling: his reverence the abbot has a right good taste in wine, or else report belies him—now to prove it." Then filling the empty goblets that stood on a side-table, "Come, my brave comrades, let us drink a safe and pleasant passage to the abbot, and the whole of his most holy community."

"Whither are we going?" asked the abbot in trepidation, his gaze fixed on

Sigesmar, in whose flaming eye, and deep contracted brow, he read a purpose that filled his soul with terror.

"To eternity!" replied Sigesmar; "to that world where Ulric waits to greet you; but first to the chapel. Said I not we should meet again at the altar where the deluded Ulric pronounced the vows you prompted? there will I offer his unquiet spirit a sacrifice; will it not be acceptable? At the altar shall you breathe your last prayer—utter your last groan."

"Is there no help, no mercy?" exclaimed the abbot, as he struggled in the strong grasp of Sigesmar.

"From whom expect help, tyrannic miscreant, dost thou "from the miserable wretches whom thy avarice and despotism compel, each hour, to wish thy death?—from me dost thou presume to solicit mercy—me, whom thy accursed arts have hurled from the bright pinnacle of greatness, banished for ever from fame and honour?"

Already the feeble contentions of father

Adrian were subdued by death, and the poniards of the *Secret Avengers*, reeking with his blood, formed a circle round the high altar, to the steps of which Sigesmar dragged the abbot, deaf to his supplications.

"Now kneel, and supplicate Heaven's mercy," said he; "one moment is granted thee to repent thy enormities; I would not stab thy soul."

But the momentary grace afforded was spent by the abbot, not in deprecating Heaven, but in servile submission, in dastardly appeals to the pity of him whose breast was steeled against his prayers.

"Said I not we should meet at the altar?" as he spurned the kneeling abbot from his feet. "At this moment, the shade of Ulric, whom thy delusions bereaved of sense—him whom thy cupidity persuaded to consign the inheritance of his only son to thy coffers, his shade stands at the judgment-seat of Heaven, demanding retribution."

Pale and trembling, the abbot again

crawled to the feet of Sigesmar; he promised ample restitution; he entreated for existence, though his future habitation were a dungeon.

"Ulric," replied Sigesmar, "Ulric demands thy blood; nightly his wandering ghost visits my couch, commands me to send thee to those realms of darkness where hypocrites like thee howl in everlasting torment, where the profaners of religion meet, in never-dying flame, the recompence of their impiety. Said I not, at this altar we should meet? here you received the vows of the deluded Ulric—vows never registered in Heaven, but recorded, for thy punishment, in the depths of hell; for they were prompted, not by religion, but by treachery—not pronounced by the lips of devotion, but uttered by superstition."

The abbot beheld the dagger gleaming in the hand of Sigesmar, and, frantic with fear, he sprang up the marble steps, and clung to the altar for protection, wildly in-

voking the interference of the saints, and calling on Heaven for aid.

No angel wafted his petition to the throne of grace; Heaven ordained, that on the spot where Ulric had weakly abdicated his rights, that he should die. The *Secret Avengers* urged dispatch; the dagger of Sigesmar was buried deep in his heart; his blood flowed over the altar, his body fell upon the tesselated pavement, and the last groan of the abbot was breathed on the spot where Ulric signed away the inheritance of his son.

For a moment Sigesmar beheld the convulsive struggles of departing nature with savage exultation; but as the eyes of his victim closed, when his limbs ceased to quiver, and as he gazed on his own hand, red with blood, a voice seemed to shriek in his ears, "thou art a *murderer*." His brain reeled; the pangs of remorse tore his heart; he was faint with agony, and leaned for support against the altar—that altar, the sanctity of which he had impiously polluted with human blood.

"We must away," said Gustrow; "the day will soon break."

"Oh that eternal darkness shadowed the world," said Sigesmar, "that day might never view this spectacle of horror!"

"In that you will surely have your wish," replied Gustrow, "for, by the mass, before daybreak, the monastery will be a pile of smoking ruins, for see, already the flames burst from the interior."

He then seized the arm of the count, and hurried him from the chapel. They soon gained the verge of the forest, where, turning their eyes back, they beheld the flames bursting from every part of the monastery, and curling in vivid wreaths to the clouds.

"Horrible!" exclaimed Sigesmar, closing his eyes; "death and devastation, indeed, mark the steps of the *Secret Avengers*.—Whither now do you lead me?" said he to Gustrow; "not to Adella! Let her not know I am a murderer. Oh no, no, these hands, red with blood, must not enfold the form of beauty—Adella

would recoil in horror—these crimson stains would terrify her gentle nature."

"You greatly mistake her disposition, count," rejoined Gustrow; "Adella is not so chicken-hearted; she has been too long connected with the *Order of Retribution* to be terrified at the sight of a little blood. But we go not to the cavern; this is no time for idle love, or woman's fooleries; we must instantly regain your apartment; the busy transactions of the night have driven from your remembrance that with the dawn you begin your march to Rosenheim."

Having again retraced the vaults, and conducted him to his chamber, Gustrow recommended him to be in readiness to attend the prince at his first summons. He then secured the disguise that had covered Sigesmar, and departed.

Being left alone, he stood some moments with his hands pressed lightly on his temples: "They throb, they ache," said Sigesmar, "but what is this pain? slight indeed to the agonies of my mind!

but am I not avenged? the accursed abbot no longer riots in my patrimony—I have sent the hypocrite to his account—I have hurled him where I must follow.—Ulric, thou hast devoted me to hell, where the exulting fiends will triumph in the thought that Sigesmar, thy son, the last count Dusseldorf, is an assassin!"

CHAP. III.

Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our place, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstacy. MACBETH.

THE sound of the trumpet, as its martial tone reverberated along the lofty battlements of Dusseldorf Castle, rolled on the startled ear of Sigesmar, not as the herald, whose inspiring breath was to marshal him to glory and renown, but as the direful proclaimer of his recent horrid deeds, for

he could not hope, nor suppose, that the destruction of the monastery would remain undiscovered after the break of day; nor did it; the first news communicated to the prince of Meiningen was the conflagration that had reduced the magnificent pile, raised by his ancestors, to ruin, from which it appeared that no soul had escaped.

The humanity of the prince was shocked; so many lives to be sacrificed by the devouring element was terrible to reflect on. Almost a stranger to the abbot, for him he felt no particular regret, though a relation, nor did his death excite any sorrow beyond the general commiseration. Having given orders for collecting and burying what bones might be dug from underneath the ruins, he joined his troop, observing, that his present cares were demanded for the living; hereafter, should his life be spared, he should have leisure to mourn for the dead.

The countenance of Sigesmar had not learned the lesson of unvarying villany,

and red and pale by turns, he listened to the various opinions that passed from mouth to mouth, on the destruction of the Carthusian monastery, some attributing to accident, others to design, the fire that had consumed an edifice, which, for strength and grandeur, had stood for ages unrivalled; but no suspicion glanced on him, though he joined the brave troop drawn up before their prince, fearing that every eye would discover on his countenance the guilt of his heart—would read in legible characters he was a *murderer*: his bosom glowed not with youthful spirit, panting for the achievement of some gallant act which should add splendour to his illustrious descent, and obtain him the glorious meed of valour—the soul of Sigesmar, at that inspiring moment, when the flame of heroism sparkled in every eye, was deepest gloom, his imagination full of past horrors; and the only hope that now swelled his despondent bosom was, that his disgrace and misery, his love and life, might

terminate beneath the walls of Rosenheim.

The fatal beauty of Adella had lured him down the precipice to whose giddy verge he had been driven by the arts of the abbot, and a long futurity presented to him no smiling hour of happiness. Possessed of her, the lovely object who had first awakened sensibility in his frame, yet his most blissful moments of enjoyment were clouded by terrific mystery; they were purchased by the eternal dereliction of honour, and stained him with perpetual ignominy. Conscience yet reared her scorpion lash; degraded, virtue was not yet totally extinct; and though the seductive form of Adella clung to his heart, with all the fascination of thrilling tenderness, yet, rather than live disgraced, dishonoured, Sigesmar preferred eternal annihilation.

As he passed the prince of Altenberg, to mount his barb, he perceived his noble countenance illuminated with all the enthusiasm of love and valour.

"Dusseldorf," said the prince, "a few hours will prove the temper of your maiden sword—I do not bid you use it nobly, for what heart can be cold, what arm nerveless, in defence of beauty? Ours is a cause in which cowardice would feel the spirit of bravery; we go to chastise vice, to release imprisoned virtue; we draw our swords in the dear and exalted cause of friendship and love—we cannot fail of victory."

He waited not a reply, but vaulting on his steed, which proudly pawed the earth, as if impatient of delay, was in an instant at the head of his troop.

"With such stimulants," thought Sigesmar, as he pursued him with his eyes, "what prodigies of valour might not a man perform! for it is the cause that gives energy to the will, and prowess to his arm, that with gigantic force vanquishes opposition, and wreathes the victor's brows with deathless laurels."

Such were the reflections of Sigesmar; and darker frowns gathered on his brow,

and deeper execrations murmured on his lips, as he again accused the unfortunate Ulric as the cause of that rashness which had bound him in the indissoluble fetters of infamy.

It was near midnight when the determined troops of Meiningen assailed the camp of Gotha, all resolute to conquer. Early on that memorable morning, Gotha had, by his herald, insolently deplored the state of the Castle, almost reduced to famine, and had demanded the princess Adelaide, on possession of whose person he promised to withdraw his troops; but in case of a refusal, he swore to remain beneath the walls of Rosenheim till the last of its inhabitants had perished.

The anguish of the baron at this insolent requisition is easier imagined than described; even from infancy he had loved the beautiful Adelaide with the tenderest, truest affection; to resign her to Gotha, her on whom the happiness of his life depended, was equally impossible to honour and to love; yet to see her perish-

ing with famine was an image too horrible for the feelings of humanity; but while he stood irresolure what answer to return, the beautiful and intrepid Adelaide unexpectedly appeared beside the almost despairing Rosenheim, on the battlements of the Castle; their own little band respectfully fell back, while the troops of Gotha crowded towards the walls, to catch a view of what to them seemed a celestial vision.

Having singled out their chief, who was conspicuous from an enormous scarlet plume, that waved upon his helmet, she thus addressed him:—

"Behold, Gotha, that Adelaide whose person you insolently demand, but who resolves to endure the excruciating pangs of that famine you threaten, rather than be yours. My revered father, the late prince of Meiningen, contracted me, in infancy, to him who, till this unnatural contest, ever acknowledged you his brother. The virtues and noble qualities of the baron Rosenheim preclude the shadow

of a wish to break through an engagement so sacredly formed, so mutually ratified. Gotha, seest thou this dagger? the moment that decrees Adelaide of Meiningen to thy power, shall find it buried in her bosom."

Gotha and his troops listened in silent admiration. The form so fair and fragile appeared like the splendid and airy sylph, which fancy embodies in the romantic imagination of the poet, while the firm voice and dignified manner in which her sentiments were uttered, seemed the energetic expressions of a hero.

A loud shout of admiration burst from the little band of Rosenheim, who, waving their helmets in the air, with one voice declared a resolution to meet, with unshrinking fortitude, the lingering death of famine, rather than yield up the princess, or betray the Castle.

The bright intelligent eyes of Adelaide spoke her thanks.

"Hear you this exalted determination, Gotha?" said the princess; "and does not

such noble testimony of virtue awaken feelings of compunction in your bosom? Lead your deluded men from the walls of Rosenheim, for in their looks I read the conviction of pursuing a dishonourable contest. Lead them, Gotha, where their bravery may meet reward—where their valorous attachment to a worthy cause may be crowned with that glorious fame which ought to attend fidelity and courage."

A murmur of applauding approbation stole through the troops of Gotha, who discovered in the altered looks of his men a growing disaffection to his cause. He feared the beauty and dangerous eloquence of Adelaide would make them converts, and induce them to lay down their arms under the walls of Rosenheim. Instantly he commanded his trumpets to sound, which, with the deep roll of the drums, drowned at once the silver tones of Adelaide.

The eyes of Rosenheim, with enamoured admiration, were turned upon her face, which was irradiated with the brilliant glow of enthusiasm; his arm twined her lovely

form, while his high-wrought imagination, as he led her from the battlements, was ready to kneel, and worship as a divinity the woman whose delicate and timid nature desperate circumstance had inspired with fortitude and noble daring.

Gotha retired to his tent, confounded and enraged, but more in love than ever; the beauty of Adelaide of Meiningen had long enslaved his senses, but he now panted to possess the heroine. With his confidential friend Lubec, he revolved the possibility, during the dark hours of night, of making a breach in the wall, under the east tower; then entering privily, stab the sentinels, and, before an alarm could be given, or their intent suspected, bear off the princess, while sunk in sleep.

To this rash scheme Lubec offered many objections, to which he saw little prospect of success, as it was natural to suppose that the princess, on whose account the Castle sustained a siege, and for whom their swords were drawn, was not left without guard; "most likely the baron Rosenheim

himself," continued Lubec, "is the sentinel who watches for the safety of his beloved."

"And who is Rosenheim?" answered Gotha; "a god, that his almighty presence is to subvert and crush an enterprize on which my happiness, my fate depends? 'tis true, he heirs the title and domain of Rosenheim—he is betrothed to the woman I love, that deceitful fair one, whose Circe smile betrayed me into the belief that I had gained a preference in her heart. Let me but bear her to Bohemia—let me but lodge her safely in my mountain fortress, then may she shriek and call on Rosenheim, while I, triumphant, pay him back that scorn which he affects to throw upon the bastard Gotha—bastard! why, aye; yet my veins are crimsoned by a tide as noble as that which enriches Rosenheim's—'twas policy, Lubec, d—d policy, not love, made me illegitimate; yet Rosenheim is the elected of this proud one's choice; and Gotha is despised, rejected; but Rosenheim is not immortal; let me but gain an entrance

to the Castle, my force, so much superior——"

"Place no reliance there," interrupted Lubec; "the Bohemians, whom hopes of plunder enrolled under your banner, already murmur at the hardships they endure, and wish for the repose their native mountains yielded after toil. Weary of a tedious siege, they talked of laying down their arms this very morn. But why should I repeat what you must needs have seen, how much the beauty and the eloquence of the fair princess moved them."

"Dastardly slaves!" exclaimed Gotha, knitting his dark brows; "but they will not, dare not desert my cause. Complain they of fatigue, they who sustain a life of hardships—obtain a scanty sustenance, by toil incessant, in their gloomy mines! but no, I cannot, will not think they would desert my standard now, when victory appears to hover on my crest—when Adelaide, the prize for whom I fight, seems within my grasp."

"I fear me," rejoined Lubec, doubt-

ingly, "I fear me there is no dependance to be placed on men who——hark! what means that tumult?"

"Tumult!" repeated Gotha, in a tone of impatience; "your ears deceive you, Lubec; that tumult is the relieving guard."

But in the next instant all was confusion in the camp. "Surprise," and "aid for Rosenheim," resounded on every side. Gotha caught up his sabre, and rushed into the thickest of the field. The troops of Meiningen pressed forward, and hemmed in the foe. Gotha's arm dealt havock round, while his voice, like deep-toned thunder, rolling over the distant hills, was every where heard, giving command, or inspiriting his men to the charge. But in vain the prince of Altenberg endeavoured to single out Gotha; though he panted for the glory of vanquishing the ferocious rival of Rosenheim, the glory of that achievement was reserved for another arm. In the midst of the assault, the sabres of Gotha and Sigesmar met.

Gotha surveyed his youthful opponent with a derisive smile. "Art thou tired of life," asked he, "that rushing thus on certain fate, thou dost presume to cope with me? Away, I would not kill thee, for I have marked thee in the battle; when time has given thine arm more pith, thou wilt be worthy Gotha's sabre. I would not cut thee off ere thou hadst gained renown; away, seek a more equal combatant; thou canst not hope to conquer Gotha."

"I promised the noble Altenberg," said Sigesmar, "that if I met thee in the field, that I would gain renown by conquering thee, or that my life should be the penalty of my presumption."

"But oh! much rather," thought he, "would I be conquered than conquer; for beneath my eye the wreath of glory withers, and what renown shall glitter on the brow of a *Secret Avenger?*"

But Sigesmar had not yet finished his career of guilt.

The impetuous Gotha raised his sabre. "If thou art bent on death," said he,

"come on; I have no time to lose in parley."

Their sabres struck fire; the contest was long and fierce. His right arm disabled, Gotha fought desperately with his left, and at length, covered with wounds, he fell at the feet of the victorious Sigesmar.

Execrations burst from the lips of Gotha, as he lay writhing in agony, but grasping the hand of Sigesmar, whose eyes were rivetted on his ferocious countenance, his last words expressed admiration of the youth and valour of him who had vanquished a veteran in arms—who had let out the life-blood of Gotha.

With his death the carnage ceased, and the joyous cry of victory resounded beneath the walls of Rosenheim, whose sentinels on the battlements had forborne to give the alarm to the Castle, believing the tumult they heard to be a treacherous scheme of Gotha's, to lure them from guard, and induce them to throw open the gates.

At the moment when the troops of Go-

tha were surrendering their arms to their conquerors, and imploring quarter, it was discovered that the east tower of the Castle, that overhung the Elbe, was on fire. Sigesmar was one of the first to perceive the blaze, and pointing it out to count Wolmar, who stood near him, he flew with the rapidity of an arrow to the gates, which were now thrown open by the aged seneschal, who had recognized in the herald of Meiningen his nephew.

A crowd followed the steps of Sigesmar, who, having gained the tower, learned from the shrieking domestics that the flames were issuing fiercest from the chamber of the princess Frederica, to whose rescue none dared venture, for already the stairs leading to her suit of apartments were encircled in flame, and all shrunk in dismay from attempting, at the hazard of their own lives, to preserve hers.

At this moment of horror, Sigesmar darted, unappalled, through the terrified croud. The cracking beams were blazing round his head; the burning floor at every

step gave way beneath his feet. He thought of the Carthusian monastery, and groaned; but here he had sworn no enmity. The princess Frederica, the sister of the prince of Meiningen, the beloved of the noble Altenberg, who had distinguished him with marked attention, was in danger of perishing—of dying the most horrible of deaths. With Herculean arm he tore the smoking doors from their hinges. He entered an apartment; the sumptuous draperies of the couch on which the princess had reposed were already consumed; all the splendid adornments of the room were reduced to a heap of burning ashes; the floor nearest the entrance was fiercely blazing, and the next instant destroyed the possibility of escape, for, with a tremendous crash, it fell in, and bearing with it the massy stone-work that supported the tower, more than half the chamber fell, with a hissing noise, into the dark waters of the Elbe.

Sigesmar beheld the yawning chasm with gloomy despondency; the fire was rapidly

advancing to the space on which he stood, and where, stretched in happy insensibility, lay the object of his search, the princess Frederica, for whose preservation it now appeared he had unavailingly exposed his own life.

"I shall die," exclaimed Sigesmar, "in the performance of a virtuous action; and will not this expiate the horrid guilt? —Oh no, no! Innocent, blameless creature!" exclaimed he, gazing despairingly on the fair form of Frederica, "thou art already in the regions of blessedness—of eternal happiness; while I, a *Secret Avenger*, am condemned to everlasting flame; to which, these ordained to consume my perishable body are ease and happiness."

A slight convulsion moved the limbs of Frederica.

"Dreadful!" continued he; "she lives; I hoped she had escaped this scene of horror."

Again the wish to save her filled his despairing mind; rushing to the window, he threw it open, and by the red glare re-

flected on the waves, discovered a small boat floating near the base of the tower. The height was awful, but, in their present situation, death was inevitable. For himself, if, in descending, he was hurled into the world of waters that foamed beneath, his life was valueless; if he perished, he escaped the toils in which his fate was entangled—he had no being to lament his untimely end, save the tender Adella. As thought recurred to her, the wish for life renewed; he snatched the princess, still insensible, from the flames that were curling round her, and folding his strong arm round her slender form, he began his dangerous descent.

"For her, lost and abandoned as I am," thought Sigesmar, "for her I may invoke Heaven's aid, for she is unstained with guilt—she is pure and innocent."

With imminent peril, and incredible labour, his feet at length rested on a narrow shelving rock; this enabled him to rest his burthen; and scarcely had he gained a safe footing before the remainder of

the tower gave way, and happily falling in an opposite direction, they escaped being precipitated with the burning ruins into the waves.

The fresh breeze that curled the waters of the Elbe recalled, for a moment, the recollection of the princess; she faintly uttered, "Is there no aid? eternal Providence, is it thy will that I must perish in the flames?" and again she sank insensible on the supporting arm of Sigesmar.

How to reach the boat was now the grand object; for though, when he beheld it from the dizzy height of the tower, it had appeared close under its walls, it was in reality far out in the stream, and the darkness of night, only dimly irradiated by the faint glimmer of the stars, which shed a feeble light on surrounding objects, prevented his ascertaining whether it could with safety be brought close to the rock on which they rested.

The princess was unable to support herself; a convulsive catching, or, at long intervals, a deep drawn sigh, were all the

symptoms she gave of existence; and in what way to recline her on the narrow projection, while he swam to what appeared to be their only resource, became the subject of distressing perplexity.

It was now he discovered that her feet were naked, and that she had no other covering to shield her from the chill breeze of night, than the thin dress in which she had escaped from her couch. Hastily he stripped off his upper garment, and wrapping it closely round her, held her sheltered from cold in his arms, wholly unconscious of the beauty he enfolded, and intent only on restoring her to her family and her lover.

The impatient glance of Sigesmar turned often towards the sky, and as the planets sank below the horizon, the hope that morning would bring relief inspired his drooping spirits, and gave new strength to his frame, which was now sensible of fatigue.

At length the dawn appeared, and he discovered, at a distance, a small vessel, to

which it was probable the boat belonged. Anxiously he watched the increasing light, interrupted only by the convulsive starts, and half-uttered incoherencies of Frederica, whose senses the horrors of the conflagration seemed to have unsettled. With joy he beheld figures moving on the deck of the vessel; with all the eagerness of renovated hope, he waved his handkerchief, but no one appeared to notice the often repeated signal. He shouted for assistance, but his voice was lost in distance, and only repeated by echo, which, like the sullen spirit of the solitude, seemed to mock his complaint. Sigesmar saw the sun rise above the summit of a lofty mountain, while he, smarting with pain, and nearly sinking with fatigue, continued to support the princess, whose lovely features, he now discovered, were expressive of almost infantile softness. Her long flaxen tresses shaded a neck of ivory whiteness; her hands and feet appeared like wax tinged with the brightest vermilion.

"How beautiful!" said Sigesmar, gazing

on her with mingled emotions of admiration and pity; "and is this interesting creature fated to perish? A happy futurity awaits her; she shall soar a cherub in the realms of bliss, and I—I am condemned to howl in the dark caverns of eternal reprobation. Alas! she knows not she reclines upon the arm of guilt—she is, happily, unconscious that her last sigh will be breathed on the bosom of a *murderer*"—

A bustle on the deck of the vessel at this instant arrested his attention; again he waved his handkerchief, again he shouted, and with joy inexpressible, beheld them lower a boat into the water—"while she will be saved, she will be restored to those she loves, and by whom she is beloved," burst in frantic tones from his lips.

A few moments brought the aid he had so many hours despaired of; he carefully carried his still-unconscious charge to the boat, and continued to support her to the landing nearest the Castle. As he turned back his thoughts to the immense height

of the tower from which he had descended, and beheld the narrow beetling rock, from which so many craggy points projected, he shuddered; their preservation was miraculous; it was the immediate intervention of protecting Heaven.

"Oh!" said he, sighing heavily, "had I not rashly sought destruction, for me thus had Providence interposed; then, instead of an upbraiding conscience, hands stained with blood—but retrospection now is agony! I am devoted—lost—*I am a Secret Avenger.*"

It was now evident that a feverish delirium had seized on the brain of Frederica, for when borne to the first cabin, she received the artless expressions of joy uttered by the attached vassals of Rosenheim with exclamations of fear, that demonstrated her terrified imagination to be still full of the horrors from which she had so narrowly escaped.

Strongly recommending her to the care of the faithful peasants, Sigesmar set forward to Rosenheim Castle, to remove the

despair of the prince of Altenberg, by announcing the safety of the princess.

Before he reached the outer gates, he was met by count Wolmar, who, on beholding him, considered dead, uttered a shout of joyful astonishment.

"Dusseldorf! sure this is no delusion! may I credit my senses—escaped the devouring flames—alive, after the demolition of the tower, into which these eyes saw you enter, and, unable to afford assistance, gazed, with many others, in despair, till submitting to the devouring element, we saw its final destruction—heard the appalling crash with which it tumbled from its lofty height, and buried, as we thought, all that remained of you and the ill-fated princess in the deep?"

"The lovely Frederica lives," said Sigesmar; "I have had the happiness to preserve her; but I am faint and ill; lead me, I beseech you, to the prince—my strength fails—lead me while I am able to relate."

Sigesmar grew pale; a passing domestic assisted count Wolmar to convey him to the Castle. As yet Sigesmar had not complained of fatigue or suffering; the pain of his right arm, which was severely scorched, and dreadful lacerations in different parts of his body, now reminded him that he stood in need of repose, after two nights spent in situations so perilous and dreadful, in which his strength of nerve had been tried to the utmost stretch, and his mind assailed by horror in its most hideous shape. His fine hair, which had clustered in rich curls round his polished forehead, had become a sacrifice to the flames, and his scorched eyebrows and burnt garments gave incontrovertible testimony of his having risked his own life to preserve that of the princess.

The death of Gotha, the unexpected deliverance of the Castle, were, till the arrival of Sigesmar, forgot, in grief and lamentation for his fate, and that of the lovely, amiable Frederica; and the peace that was

restored to Rosenheim, by the defeat and fall of its turbulent invader, was celebrated with tears and mourning.

Those who beheld the combat between Sigesmar and Gotha, bewailed him as a hero, whose undaunted courage and unshrinking valour deserved immortality; and others, who had seen him rush through opposing flames, over burning barriers, to the rescue of a female he had never seen, extolled his humanity, and declared such virtue was worthy canonization, for he had sacrified himself with the exalted hope of preserving another.

His name was no sooner pronounced in Rosenheim Castle by count Wolmar, than all the household crouded round to catch a sight of a man who had so nobly dared in the cause of virtue and humanity. Some bent the knee in homage of the valour every lip loudly extolled, while others burst into tears, and gave his deeds the silent tribute of grateful sensibility.

The prince of Meiningen heard his narrative of escape from the window of the

tower, with feelings that did honour to his own nature, while at the same moment they amply gratified the proud spirit of Sigesmar.

The princess Adelaide listened in awe and wonder; she gazed on the effulgent eyes, and towering figure of the count, and her enthusiastic fancy thought him more than mortal. Overcome by grateful emotion, she caught his hand, pressed it to her lips, murmured, "Preserver of my sister," and fainted in the arms of Rosenheim.

The prince of Altenberg threw his arms round him, and while he held him strained in his embrace, vowed to be his friend for ever.

For a moment the exulting heart of Dusseldorf forgot its secret miseries; the voice of conscience ceased to reproach him; this was a period of triumph, of virtuous exultation. He had conquered the foe of his prince—he had rescued a lovely female from destruction, and that female was the beloved affianced wife of

his friend; yet transient was the gleam of pleasure that illumined the dark recesses of his bosom, for he remembered he was a knight of the *Order of Retribution*, and the delighted smile that had played for an instant on his lip, vanished in the execration he breathed against Ulric, the primary cause of his fatal dereliction of virtue —the beam of joy that brightened in his eye as he heard the warm approbation that flowed from every tongue, was suddenly dimmed by the recollection of his inauguration in the cavern of the forest.

"I might," thought Sigesmar, as his thoughts reverted to his situation, "I might have been deserving of this praise; I might, indeed, have been a hero, had not d——d treachery, and weak credulity, conspired to stamp me a villain."

The wounds of Sigesmar were dressed; he ate sparingly, and was conducted to the chamber prepared for his repose. Exhausted nature soon sunk in a deep sleep; but the vision that visited his fancy brought not the renovating balm of tran-

quillity; it was coloured by the dark, eventful circumstances of his life, and the scenes of the Carthusian cloister; his adventure with Adella; the defeat of Gotha, and his perilous escape with Frederica from the tower of Rosenheim—all, in disjointed parts, hovered in his dreams, and tortured his bosom, with pangs as bitter as those which accusing conscience inflicted, when the reflective power of reason painted the dreadful past, and the terrific future.

In the mean time, the princess Frederica had been brought back to the Castle, where the unwearied attentions of her affectionate relatives, aided by the tender assiduities of her lover, soon restored her to health; nor was it long before her deliverer, at her request, was introduced to her presence, to receive the grateful acknowledgments which all, while they gazed on her so worthy to be loved, considered his due.

If Frederica had appeared lovely in the eyes of count Dusseldorf, when divested of every ornament, and pale and lifeless as

she lay in his arms, insensible alike to her appearance and situation, how much more beautiful her fairy form now met his eye, arrayed in the splendid habiliments of rank, her glossy flaxen tresses braided with gems, here azure eyes sparkling with the animation of gratitude, and her cheek suffused with the bright carnation of modesty!

The lips of Sigesmar pressed her snowy hand, and the touch communicated a flame to his heart, more fierce and unconquerable than those from which his arms had borne her. In an instant Sigesmar felt he loved, and with a passion distinct from that which Adella had inspired. The princess Frederica infused into his bosom a sentiment of awe and respect, mingled with the tenderest admiration. Her exquisitely-moulded person was small and delicate; in her manner she was retiring, her sentiments and opinions were delivered with a blushing timidity, in a voice sweet and plaintive, that charmed the ear and won upon the reason, which ever confessed

her amiable as she was fair; in disposition mild and gentle, as her form was feminine and fragile.

The image of Adella became every hour less seductive to the imagination of the count, who, enchanted by the bashful beauty of the princess, wondered by what art, what witchery she had seduced his reason. He now perceived the difference between virtue and vice with agonizing emotions of remorse, as he beheld the refined and respectful attentions of the prince of Altenberg, which, though evidently received with pleasure by the princess, yet were ever accepted with the blushing diffidence of a mind fearful to betray a tenderness which might sully the angelic purity of innocence.

The intended marriage of the baron Rosenheim with the princess Adelaide now set the Castle in the gay bustle of preparation; all were actively employed in devising ornaments, or inventing some new species of entertainment to diversify the nuptial festivities. The tower was again

rebuilt, with magical expedition; the most celebrated artists of Germany were employed to render it more magnificent than before the conflagration. On the pannels of a splendid apartment which opened on the Elbe, was portrayed the combat of Sigesmar and Gotha. On the countenance of the latter was depicted all the dark and savage wishes that had invigorated his arm, the demon passions of his soul sat on his contracted brow; while the eyes of his youthful opponent were illuminated by hope, and his fine features expressed the fixed determination to conquer or die; though over all the countenance hung the gloomy veil of sadness, which ever characterized the original. The tower in flames, and Sigesmar's wonderful preservation of the princess Frederica, their perilous situation on the rock, was also faithfully delineated, with exquisite taste and masterly skill.

"Oh that we had perished together!" thought the count, as he surveyed the paintings. "Oh that my existence had

then found a termination! then, when my arms enfolded that matchless loveliness, our souls would have fled together; and mine, quitting its polluted habitation, in the act of endeavouring to preserve an angel, might have been permitted to share her heaven; but, separated on earth, so shall we be hereafter. Her abode in the regions of eternity will be with beings pure and holy—mine——yes, Ulric, the fanatic Ulric, has prepared a place in hell's deepest caverns for Sigesmar the *murderer*."

The expected nuptials of the baron with the princess Adelaide had already filled the Castle with illustrious guests, and every passing hour the agonies of Sigesmar were rendered more acute, by the attentions lavished on him, and the praises he was compelled to listen to; his valour, his humanity, were continually extolled; and various were the offers of friendship made him, by nobles high in rank and power, to promote his fortunes, and open to him the path to greatest honours in a military ca-

reer; but the prince of Meiningen constantly replied, that the count Dusseldorf's fortunes were his care, and that he had in contemplation such a reward as the most scrupulous delicacy could not shrink from the acceptance of.

The wish of Sigesmar was to quit the German empire, to fly for ever from the scenes which guilt had rendered hateful; but his oaths given in the cavern of the forest rose in horrible recollection to deter him: and where, alas! in what quarter of the habitable globe could he hope to conceal himself from the *Secret Avengers*, whose influence extended over the world, and would never cease to pursue him? it was this conviction that harrassed his days, that rendered sleep unrefreshing, that chased from his cheek the rose that would have tinted it, and knit his naturally open forehead into furrows of sadness or of horror.

Being one day rallied by the lively count Wolmar on the uncommon cast of his character, the particular solemnity of his

countenance, and the unaccountable reserve of his manner, the princess Adelaide, in some agitation, observed, that probably count Dusseldorf's melancholy and abstraction proceeded from love; and being absent from the object of his affections, might occasion the sadness so conspicuous to every one; perhaps, too, his passion was not returned; it might, unfortunately, be hopeless.

Sigesmar felt a sick pang at his heart, while a flash of crimson hovered for a moment on his cheek.

"Or if," rejoined the princess Frederica, "the count meets a reciprocity of tenderness, love is full of solicitude and jealousy. If ever the bosom experiences tranquillity, be assured it is when love has no dominion there."

"I remember," said count Wolmar, eagerly pursuing the subject, "I remember a certain tender billet he received, inviting him to a secret assignation."

Sigesmar appeared disordered.

The princess Adelaide gave him a glance

of mournful expression, and struggled to suppress a sigh.

"No more of this, count Wolmar, I entreat you," said Sigesmar; "the cause of my sorrow is of a mingled nature; part constitutional, part the *effect* of circumstance."

He paused, and the baron Rosenheim remarked, "that the days of count Dusseldorf having passed in a monastery, where the voice of mirth was considered impious, and where the animating influence of female society was never admitted, it was strictly natural that his mind and manners should acquire and imbibe the solemnity with which he was surrounded. On the face of a Carthusian monk, smiles were a phenomena seldom beheld; and their conversations, limited to learned controversy, were by no means likely to give the mind that light way of thinking which begets gaiety: the gloom of a cloister presents but few incitements to cheerfulness, but rather contributes to nourish——"

"Horror!" exclaimed Sigesmar, "to prompt to deeds of desperation."

He rushed from the apartment, leaving his friends astonished at the vehemence with which this short sentence had been uttered, and the abruptness of his departure.

The prince of Altenberg expressed concern that the subject had been started, and was of opinion, that the mention of a monastery always produced irritation, which might easily be accounted for: the death of his father doubtless hung heavy on his spirits, and the alienation of his domains rankling in his thoughts, produced the deep gloom that never left his features.

"If in the latter cause," replied Leopold, "exists Sigesmar's secret sorrow, its duration will, thank Heaven, be short; the ensuing autumn brings to Dresden our fair and youthful cousin, Rosamund of Brandenburgh, the wealthy heiress of two illustrious houses; with her hand, and the domain of Dusseldorf, I mean to express my grateful sense of the services which in-

deed no rewards can compensate; for to his valour and humanity I owe the happiness that now surrounds me—the inestimable bliss of viewing these, my dearest treasures, alive and in safety."

Leopold raised alternately the hands of his sisters to his lips. The prince of Altenberg, on his knees, pressed the other snowy hand of Frederica to his bosom; at the same instant, as if inspired by the same devout enthusiasm, their upraised eyes sought Heaven in thankfulness, then rested in delight upon each other, while a sympathetic glow suffused the face of either—his the warm, rich crimson of hope and love, hers of tenderness, refined by virgin bashfulness. One arm of the enraptured Rosenheim encircled the beautifully-rounded waist of Adelaide; his lips rapturously pressed the hand her brother placed in his; but no corresponding glance spoke on her part congenial feeling; the features of the baron expressed the ardor of passion, eager for the completion of promised felicity.

Adelaide trembled; her bosom chilled; and a tear, which would not be suppressed, trickled down her cheek, which was pale, and cold as marble.

"You are ill, my beloved," exclaimed Rosenheim, as, leaning on the arm of Frederica, she attempted to smile, and faintly said, "Be not alarmed, I am not ill, only a little overcome; I shall be better presently."

Being led to her chamber, she entreated her sister to leave her, and dismissing her attendants, sunk on a couch, and giving way to her oppressed feelings, wept bitterly.

From infancy Adelaide had been accustomed to consider herself the designated bride of Rosenheim; that on him she should bestow her hand, was the last injunction she received from the lips of her dying father. At Rosenheim Castle, under the guardianship of the baron's mother, she chiefly resided; but this constant intercourse destroyed the effect it was intended to produce; for while it strength-

ened the affection of the baron, it produced on the heart of the princess only the same tranquil affection she felt for her brother. She respected the virtues of Rosenheim; she allowed that he was handsome and well-proportioned; but his character wanted the energy, his mind the enthusiasm and sublimity, that could awaken sensibility in a soul like hers. Yet Adelaide was contented with her destination; she was satisfied with being loved; and never having felt passion, supposed that esteem and respect were sufficient feelings for a delicate female; and that in obeying the command of her father, and fulfilling the wish of her brother, she should perform her duties, and, of consequence, ensure herself perfect felicity in connubial life.

The bosom of the princess Adelaide, now in her eighteenth year, had hitherto resembled the calm of those unruffled seas, on whose waves the halcyon builds its nest. The rosy beams of every morning ushered in a day of uninterrupted pleasure, and

night brought to her pillow balmy slumbers and dreams of happiness. Beloved by the baroness with an affection equal to that she felt for her son—idolized by him, and worshipped by the vassals, each wish anticipated, and every glance obeyed, time had flown in a circle of delight, scattering roses on her path. To Rosenheim's tale of love she had listened from childhood, and if she did not look forward to her nuptials with emotions of transport, she felt pleasure in the idea of promoting his happiness; and amidst the gay preparations making at the Castle, her pleasure was heightened by the presence of her sister, the princess Frederica, who had arrived at Rosenheim to pass a month with her previous to her marriage.

It was at this juncture that the ferocious Gotha invested Rosenheim; and the introduction of Sigesmar to the Castle, whose person was formed to command, under circumstances which made him appear a hero, adorned with the richest and most glorious attributes of humanity, dissolved at once

the trance in which the sensations of Adelaide had hitherto tranquilly reposed. The majestic mien, the dazzling eyes, the commanding height of Sigesmar, were beheld by the admiring Adelaide with feelings strong and tumultuous, such as her young bosom had never before experienced.

"I am grateful to him," said she, mentally, "for the eminent services he has rendered us—services of so uncommon a nature, of such high import, that I may well feel these strange emotions, this gratitude that melts in my eye, that, throbbing in my bosom, almost stops my breath, when I would speak my thanks."

But the brilliant fires which at times would elicit from the dark eye of Sigesmar, the mournful smile that for a moment would hover over the rich coral of his lip, communicated to the princess the fatal knowledge that the warm feelings she had innocently mistaken for gratitude were in reality love. The tone of his voice, melodious, though solemn, ran thrilling through

her veins; and if by chance her glance encountered his, a thousand blushing apparitions rushed to her face and bosom, evidences of that passion so new and so unconquerable. The once delightful domain of Rosenheim now ceased to present the princess a single prospect for admiration; the tender attentions of the baron wearied, nay, sometimes disgusted her; all now was dreary, dull, and uninteresting. She compared the baron's person with the lofty port of the majestic Sigesmar, and her diseased fancy sunk him into insignificance, while it elevated the count into a god. Her fast-approaching nuptials were now considered with dread; in the deep silence of night, Adelaide shed the tears of anguish she resolutely restrained during the day; and prayed for annihilation, rather than pronounce vows with which her heart refused to accord.

Frederica, who tenderly loved her sister, beheld with affliction this change in her manner, from gay to melancholy; the paleness of her cheek, and the pensive air

which hung upon a countenance once cheerful and animated. She observed that a large portion of her time was spent in the tower, in that apartment where the story of Gotha's defeat and death was painted. Entering it by accident one day, she found Adelaide on her knees before the picture; her hands clasped, and her eyes fixed on the figure of Sigesmar, who was delineated waving his sabre over the fallen Gotha. Her look, her attitude, and the name of Sigesmar, frequently and tenderly pronounced, disclosed at once to the almost petrified Frederica the fatal secret of her sister's heart—the disastrous passion that had stolen the bloom from her cheek, that had introduced sorrow into a bosom till now the mansion of peace; it was a discovery of horror, for on the morrow she was to be the bride of the baron Rosenheim.

Frederica advanced, and laying her trembling hand on the shoulder of her sister (who, deeply absorbed in afflictive

contemplation, had not heard her approach), pronounced her name.

Adelaide, in terror, started from her kneeling attitude; a scarlet suffusion dyed her face, which was instantly succeeded by a paleness resembling death. Frederica moved hastily towards the door of the apartment, but guessing her intent, Adelaide caught her arm, and forbade her calling assistance. Her emotions then found relief in a violent gush of tears, which having subsided, she said—"Frederica, my beloved sister, hear at once my confession and my resolve; you have discovered the secret sorrow of my heart, the fatal weakness that destroys my peace; but fear not for my future conduct; Adelaide of Meiningen will not disgrace her illustrious descent; the future wife of the baron Rosenheim will remember the dignity of her character. As this is the first, be it also the last moment when this unhappy subject shall be glanced at between us."

"Heroic girl!" exclaimed Frederica, folding her arms round her, "so worthy of

happiness, I trust thy virtuous resolutions will be aided by Heaven with fortitude."

The next morning Adelaide of Meinin-gen received the vows of the baron of Rosenheim, in the chapel of the Castle, and plighted hers in return; and never was that sacred vow violated by an indulged thought; for if ever the image of Siges-mar obtruded on her imagination, she flew to the refuge of society, and in the faith-ful performance of her duties, found con-solation for the pang that sometimes swell-ed her bosom with an unwilling sigh.

After the ceremony of the baron's mar-riage was over, as they were returning to the Castle, the count's eye encountered the dreaded form of Gustrow—him whose unwelcome presence ever tore from his mind the thin veil with which forgetful-ness strove to shadow its guilt and horror. A well-recognized sign informed him that he had something of importance to impart, and appointed a meeting in a defile not far distant from the Castle.

At such a time to receive a summons of

this nature, was terrible; associated with the noble and virtuous, by whom he was caressed and respected, he would have forgot, if possible, that he was a *Secret Avenger*; his soul turned in disgust and anguish from again encountering, or holding commerce with, the knights of the *Order of Retribution*; but his fatal oaths compelled him to obey; and when all were happily engaged in the nuptial festivities, the miserable Sigesmar, with a brain almost maddening, stole from the gay and splendid circle of the Castle, to meet the being whom most on earth he hated, whom alone, of all created men, he feared.

The night was clear and beautiful, millions of stars sparkled in the blue concave, through which the moon rolled her silver orb, unobscured by a passing cloud. Not a breath was heard, save the low murmur of the breeze, that waved with gentle breath the heads of a few shrubs that scantily clothed the rocky path which wound through the gloomy defile; the scene was tranquil; all nature seemed lulled in the

calmness of repose, all but the breast of Sigesmar, whose pulses throbbed with the fever of horrible expectation, for he dreaded that this appointment was the precursor of some bloody expedition.

About the middle of the defile he was met by Gustrow, who accosted him with, "Well encountered; the night wears apace, count, and I began to think the gaieties of the Castle had made you forgetful of our appointment."

"Forget!" said Sigesmar, "no, I could not forget; that was impossible"

"I appointed this unfrequented spot," resumed Gustrow, "to remind you of your oaths."

"They are registered," replied Sigesmar, "in never-fading characters on my brain; other records forgetfulness may shroud, or time efface, but the transactions of that night are ever present; over them remembrance never slumbers."

"I thought," resumed Gustrow, "that the glory achieved by the conquest of Gotha, the praise of princes, and the flattery

of beauty, might have seduced your mind, and made you repent your inauguration."

A dark frown gathered on the brow of Sigesmar, his hands convulsively pressed his bosom, "And if I did," said he, with a smothered groan, "if I did repent, would it be wonderful?"

"Ha! beware," continued Gustrow; "if by a word, a look, you give suspicion that you would recall the mystery of your inauguration, that you repent the oath that sealed you a *Secret Avenger*, you know the penalty."

"I do," said Sigesmar, and his frame shuddered at the fearful recollection.

"As yet," continued Gustrow, "you know not half our power; take heed, then, how you suffer the pleasure of the present hour to breed distaste for those dangers in which you have sworn to share: beware; keep constant watch upon your words and actions; the *Secret Avengers* see where no other eyes can penetrate; they hear the lowest whisper breathed on the ear of confidence. Count Dusseldorf, re-

member your oaths; though already you appear to have forgot her for whose sake they were sworn."

"Adella!" exclaimed Sigesmar, with a groan, "Adella!"

"Aye, Adella," repeated Gustrow; "by the mass, she seems to have escaped your recollection entirely."

"Alas!" replied Sigesmar, in a voice of agony, "how much you are mistaken!—Adella forgotten! oh no; she lives in my heart, in my brain; waking and sleeping, she is ever present to my imagination. Have I not cause to remember her? only with the last throb of my heart will the remembrance of Adella expire."

"Oh happy, joyful hearing!" said a soft voice, and instantly a figure, habited as a page, clung to the arm of the count, who turned in astonishment; his eye anxiously perused the face, to which the soft mellow moonlight gave a touching character, as it glittered on the ebon ringlets that shaded the forehead. His lips whispered, "Adella?"

"Yes," answered she, "Adella, thy

Adella, who could no longer support the torture of thy absence—who could no longer exist from the beloved of her heart—thy Adella, who has trembled and wept in thy absence—who has for thee forgot her sex, encountered danger and fatigue, to assure herself of thy safety—to have again the bliss of holding thee to her palpitating heart."

Sigesmar listened and gazed, and his reason again yielded to the soft blandishments of the enchantress. Her love, so daringly evinced, awakened his gratitude; her beauty inflamed his passions; and as the tears glittered in her eyes, and hung upon her roseate cheek, she appeared so lovely, so fascinating to his senses, that the delicate, timid Frederica receded from his heart, and Adella again become its sovereign.

At the bottom of the defile, a few rude cabins were scattered; in one of these resided a relation of Gustrow's. To this mean hovel Adella led the subjugated Sigesmar; and here, during the marriage festivities at Rosenheim, she remained concealed, every night visited by the count,

over whose mind she gained, by the beauty of her person, and the seduction of her manners, an influence strong and lasting. When returning day called him from her arms to the Castle, he felt and acknowledged the supremacy of virtue; he adored the lovely princess Frederica, he envied the prince of Altenberg every gentle smile she bestowed upon him, and experienced the torturing hell of jealousy, whenever a look of pleasure from her rewarded his attentions. But at the hour when Adella met him in the defile—when his ear drank the magic tones of her melodious voice—when he beheld her light fingers sweep the strings of the lute, and call forth the harmony of entrancing music—when his head reposed on the swelling down of her luxuriant bosom, his heated imagination confessed the witchery of her attractions, acknowledged her superior to all womankind. By her his senses were fascinated; he considered virtue but as a sound, for such was the opinion of the siren Adella; and the weak, guilty Sigesmar, in whose mind nature had

sown the seeds of every nobler principle, sunk in sensuality, resigned his better judgment to her, by whom, and for whom, he mounted, by degrees, from vice to vice, till pre-eminent in villany, he became the terror of even that dreadful *Order* of which, in process of time, he became the chief.

CHAP. IV.

A robber, I—sure you did not say it?
No, no, I did mistake the word; you could
Not mean so to debase me. SHAKESPEARE.

DURING the few weeks the prince of Meiningen remained at Rosenheim Castle, after the marriage of his sister Adelaide, faithful to the virtuous resolution she had formed, she endeavoured to behold Sigesmar with indifference, and to attach her erring affections where duty and honourable principle pointed the justice and the propriety. The character of Adelaide was grand and aspiring; that of the baron Rosen-

heim was kind, humane, and tender; but it wanted those sublime energies which, in the conduct of Sigesmar, have appeared so conspicuous, and which had so fatally impressed themselves on the enthusiastic mind of the princess. But no sooner was she sensible of the enervating softness that was taking possession of her bosom, than she resolved to release herself from the dangerous infection.

By yielding an unresisting acquiescence to the tyranny of love, we become its victims; combat with resolution, and the heart soon emancipates itself from the despotism of passion. However hard the struggle, virtue eventually triumphed, and the noble-minded Adelaide was at length enabled to view the conqueror of Gotha, and the preserver of her sister Frederica, with gratitude unmingled with a softer sentiment. Again restored to reason, she ceased to regret her alliance with the baron Rosenheim; she reflected with satisfaction that he was the selected of a fond and indulgent parent, whose memory she re-

vered; whose loss she regretted, and whose unerring judgment she reverenced.

Thus thinking, the heart of Adelaide was peaceful, her cheek resumed the roseate bloom of health, her dark eyes again sparkled with vivacity, and her lovely mouth dimpled with smiles.

Not thus tranquil was the bosom of count Dusseldorf, for though his passions were still powerfully excited by the beauty and blandishments of the seducing Adella, his heart, his understanding, and his ambition, were inflamed and captivated by the princess Frederica, the announcing of whose nuptials with the prince of Altenberg, and the arrangements made for the ceremony taking place as soon as they arrived at Dresden, gave to his already-disordered mind fresh tumults; for to his other raging passions, jealousy was now added; and while he meditated on what he was, a *Secret Avenger*, and thought on what he might have been, but for the pernicious beauty of Adella, worked up to fits of frenzy, he was many times on the

point of destroying her who had brought this ruin on him, and of ending his own earthly miseries by striking to his heart the sword the prince of Altenberg had presented to him.

It was in this frame of temper Sigesmar left Rosenheim Castle, with the rest of the party, and proceeded to Dresden, where the marriage of the princess Frederica with the beloved of her heart, the every-way-deserving prince of Altenberg, shortly after took place at the superb palace of her illustrious family, with all the pomp and splendor that art could devise, and wealth bestow: and here, surrounded by gaiety and grandeur, honoured and distinguished by the first nobility of the realm, Sigesmar might have considered himself happy, had not the perpetual sight of the detested and dreaded Gustrow, and his continued visits to Adella, who was placed in an obscure house in the suburbs of the city, reminded him but too forcibly of his miserable and degraded situation, and had not his hopeless passion for the lovely

Frederica tormented him with an envious and gnawing jealousy, that made him hate the happy Altenberg, and continually wish himself or his fortunate rival annihilated. Though Adella still influenced his passions, and could, by the sophistry of her arguments, the melody of her lute, and the incitements of her beauty, lull him into temporary forgetfulness of his debasement, yet when beyond her sphere of fascination, there were moments when the terrible conflicts of his soul were but too legibly written on his countenance; and this gloomy and ferocious character was frequently obvious, when witnessing the happiness of the prince of Altenberg and his beautiful bride, demonstrated in every look and word; it was then the pangs of rage and jealousy, too fierce and keen to smother, would frown horribly on his dark brow, and give to his conversation the incoherence of insanity.

In some of these moods he had been observed by Gustrow, who having given the hint to Adella, she took the opportu-

nity of remarking to Sigesmar, "that the *Order of Retribution* demanded from its members unshrinking fortitude, and inviolable secrecy; that the oaths taken at inauguration enforced the wearing an unsuspicious countenance, alike unmoved under every circumstance, and in every situation; suffering neither blush, nor glance, nor exclamation, to betray the wishes or intentions of the mind; wear ever a placid, smiling exterior; bear on your tongue honied acquiescence; give greeting with your eye and hand, nor suffer the contraction of your brow, or coldness of your salutation, to speak the heart's antipathies, or advertise its secret purposes."

Such was the advice of Adella, and Sigesmar promised to profit by it, to teach his countenance an unvarying firmness; "and this," said he, mentally, "can only be achieved by forgetting I was ever any other than a *Secret Avenger*."

Some time after this conversation had taken place, having retired to his chamber for the night, he threw open his window,

and stood for some minutes gazing on the heavens, and watching the stars, which thickly studded the majestic concave.

"If those," said Sigesmar, "are, as school-men tell us, worlds, no doubt they are inhabited—aye, inhabited—for to what purpose create them, but for the habitation of some beings? but of what nature are those beings? Perhaps the souls of just men; those who on earth sustained with rectitude the parts assigned them by their Maker. Exalted to those shining orbs, they may dwell there in bowers of bliss; but for the wretch, sworn to the work of infamy, whose hands are stained with blood, where shall his spirit wander? it shall not mount to you, yon glittering spheres; no, no, below the centre of the earth, in darkness, in suffocating steams."

Sigesmar hastily closed the window—he paced the spacious apartment; he viewed its costly adornments, and with a heavy sigh said, "Happy is the peasant in the rudest cabin on the bleakest mountain; his eye has never coveted the gilded trap-

pings of greatness; his heart has never been tempted by wealth; oh no, he eats the black bread which his labour has procured, with thankfulness; hunger makes it sweet; and the running stream, as it slacks his thirst, is most delicious to his palate: and then his sleep—no visions of horror disturb his straw bed; peaceful and refreshing are his slumbers. Oh! had I been born a peasant, such contented days, such tranquil nights had been mine; but now, lost is the hope of happiness here and hereafter, for I—hear it, Ulric, and shudder at thy work—I, Sigesmar, the last of the illustrious house of Dusseldorf, I am a *Secret Avenger*."

He now prepared to seek, in the forgetfulness of sleep, a short cessation from the misery of his own thoughts, when he was surprised by seeing a large mirror, which formed a pannel opposite his bed, shake violently, and move backwards and forwards. As his eye rested with no little wonder on this strange movement, he saw

it slide down, and in the next instant his evil genius stood before him, in the form of the hated Gustrow.

"You seem a little surprised, count," said he, replacing the mirror.

"Not a little," answered Sigesmar, throwing himself on a chair.

"I come unexpectedly," resumed Gustrow.

"You do indeed," replied the count, with a sigh; for his mind reverted to the equally-unexpected visit he had received from this man in the Castle of Dusseldorf, and he now shuddered at the remembrance of the horrors that interview had led to, and the probable supposition that some dreadful enterprise was now in agitation, to which his services were about to be demanded.

"I have been watching all day," said Gustrow, seating himself opposite the count, without waiting for the ceremony of an invitation, "for an opportunity of conversing with you a few moments in private."

"You have obtained it then at last," replied Sigesmar, in an accent of asperity.

"Aye, marry, and not without a good share of difficulty," resumed the undaunted Gustrow; "for I perceive, count, you would gladly avoid speech with me, on any occasion; but remember the cavern of the forest; recollect the oath, count, that makes us brothers, and entitles me——"

"Proceed, proceed," said Sigesmar; "I have not drank of the waters of Lethe."

"The knights of the *Order of Retribution*," continued Gustrow, unheeding the petulance of the count, "allow not to their members a will of their own; remember, one heart, one mind, the general voice, the general approval, must govern every action: nor must a *Secret Avenger* presume to dream that he lives for himself, or believe that his most private movement is not noted by the fraternity."

"And why this tedious repetition," said

the count, "of what I have at least heard an hundred times? to your business."

"By the mass," replied Gustrow, "I am too much fatigued, just now, to hurry myself."

They were both silent for some time; Sigesmar dreading, yet burning with impatience to learn the purport of his unwelcome visit; and Gustrow malignantly enjoying the rack on which he perceived he had stretched the feelings of the miserable Dusseldorf.

At length he resumed his discourse, saying, "I have, as I observed before, count, obtained this interview with much hazard; aye, by the mass, and with no little portion of hard labour too, for the springs in all the secret openings are rusted from disuse, and only yield to downright force."

"Here then," interrupted Sigesmar, "as well as in the Castle of Dusseldorf, you are acquainted——"

"With all the windings, intricacies, and secret openings of this noble edifice," re-

plied Gustrow; "for in this same palace my father had the honour of serving the late prince of Meiningen, in the confidential office of major-domo; and by his parental tenderness, I was instructed in all the secrets of the mansion; the present prince being of a wild disposition, was but little in the confidence of his father, and remains, to this hour, in absolute ignorance of the private entrances to all the chief apartments. Leopold was on a tour of pleasure, in a distant province, when his father was seized by death, and from time immemorial, only the reigning prince and his major-domo have had the knowledge of the important passages."

Sigesmar's countenance expressed horror and impatience.

"My presence, count, does not appear to give you much pleasure; neither does my acquaintance with the secret entrances seem to interest you."

"Pleasure!" replied Sigesmar, pressing his fingers convulsively on his forehead, "pleasure! alas! my mind can never more

receive it; and as to interest, what now in this detested life can interest a wretch like me?"

"And yet," rejoined Gustrow, with a demoniac grin, "I remember when the very name of Adella inspired pleasure and created interest; but you know, I told you that possession——"

"Oh that I had never seen her!" interrupted Sigesmar, clasping his hands wildly; "oh that oceans had rolled—mountains had risen between us!"

"Here's a change, with a vengeance," said Gustrow; "not long since, and you would have scaled a mountain, or swam an ocean, to reach her, when her beauty—"

"Name it not," replied the count; "her beauty has been the fatal rock on which my everlasting happiness is wrecked; her beauty has degraded and rendered me infamous in this world, and in the next condemns me to——"

"Hold there, count," said Gustrow; "as to the other world, if there is another, why, neither you nor I, nor the wisest of

us, know any thing about how affairs will be managed; I never pester my brains with guessing; it is sufficient for me to watch the transactions of this life; and I must needs laugh to think how a few weeks will alter the dispositions of men, making them lothe the pretty toys which they would have sacrificed almost life to obtain—marry, it is fresh in my remembrance, count, when you swore——"

"Forbear!" said Sigesmar, starting up, "forbear, I charge you; I need no remembrancer; here lives the horrid record! —recall not the scene of my debasement —point not out the fall of the degraded Dusseldorf. Oh, could I live again the last few months, how different——"

"It is now too late," resumed Gustrow, "for repentance; you should have reflected, count, in the solitude of the Carthusian cloister; you should have refused while the alternative was in your power; no force was used to compel you to become a member of our fraternity; you had the

free choice either to abandon Adella, or take the oath."

"It was not love," said Sigesmar, "it was madness—a fever of the blood—oh, Adella! syren, enchantress! you have undone me—you have cut short the race of Dusseldorf!"

"No, by the mass, not so," replied Gustrow, "for my business with you now is, to say that Adella is in the way to continue the race."

"How!" resumed Sigesmar; "did I hear right? what said you, Gustrow?"

"I said," replied he, "that Adella is in the way to make you a father."

The count sunk again on his seat; a new, unfelt emotion seized on his heart, and Adella returned to his imagination with all the fascination of loveliness and melting tenderness. "I—Adella, become parents in such circumstances!" said he, wringing his hands; "is it thus, disgraced, stigmatized, the race of Dusseldorf must be continued? for all the sophistry of

love cannot disguise realities. Oh, horrible !"

Gustrow laughed at his agonizing reflections, and by way of consolation, said, "You are far too delicate in this matter, count; Adella is perfectly content to be the mother of your child in this way, for it was without the aid of a priest she came into the world herself. You must know, count, that Adella is no sister of mine."

"Not your sister !" said Sigesmar.

"No," resumed Gustrow, "nor is she the daughter, but the niece of Theresa Adella, I promise you, has princely blood in her veins; her father was the late prince of Meiningen."

"How !" replied the astonished count, "Adella the sister of Leopold ?"

"Aye, marry is she," said Gustrow, "and might have been a princess, but for the trifling luck of being born in marriage; her mother was a silly girl, with a handsome person; she was an orphan, and resided with us on the Dusseldorf domain

at the time the Castle passed into the hands of the prince of Meiningen; he promised, flattered, and deceived her; for, concealing his marriage, he persuaded the easy fool that he would make her his wife. Ulrica, when too late, discovered his perfidy, and that already he was a husband and a father. Weltzer, a soldier (who, from disgust, had left the army, supposing his services had not met the degree of promotion they merited), had settled near us, and became enamoured of Ulrica; this Weltzer was the founder of our *Order*, count, a brave, unshrinking fellow. Well, he was informed of Ulrica's situation, and after swearing to revenge her on the villain who had so basely deceived her innocence, he married her. She died in giving birth to Adella, and Weltzer himself, before he could accomplish the vengeance he meditated, received a fatal wound in one of our enterprizes; he left this world bequeathing the infant Adella to the care of my mother and to myself, (who had become a *Secret Avenger*), and

the rest of the fraternity the accomplishment of his sworn revenge on the family of Meiningen."

"But was the unhappy story of Ulrica never disclosed to Leopold?" asked Sigesmar.

"Never," replied Gustrow; "that was part of the oath exacted by Ulrica; secret, unsuspected vengeance was the condition of her marriage with Weltzer: living and dying, revenge on the house of Meiningen was the request of Ulrica: and it will not now be difficult for you to comprehend, count, why you, who had also suffered injury from the same hand, was so easily admitted a member."

"Admitted!" reiterated Sigesmar, "say rather inveigled, trepanned; with such a mesh wound round me, it was impossible I should escape. Oh! I have been made the dupe of most successful villany."

Gustrow half drew a dagger from his bosom; a frown gathered on his terrific brow; and the stride he made towards the count seemed to menace his life; but suddenly

stopping, he withdrew his hand from the dagger; "This," said he, "is no time to cavil about terms, or resent private injuries. In telling you the history of Ulrica, I forgot the main object of my visit here, count."

Sigesmar felt his blood chill—his frame shook with horror—his mind presaged some dreadful enterprize, as he, gasping and faltering, asked, why he had been disturbed at that hour?

"All hours are alike to the members of our *Order*, count Dusseldorf," replied Gustrow; "I come from Adella, and the time was when I, as Love's messenger, should have been greeted with rapturous welcome."

"Tell Adella," replied Sigesmar, rejoiced that his mind had for once been deceived in its prognostic of evil, "tell her that affairs which have held me in the presence of the prince, early and late, have prevented my seeing her for the last four days, but to-morrow night she may with certainty expect me."

"She will no doubt rejoice to see you," said Gustrow, "for many a tear has dimmed the bright eye of Adella, and many a complaint has fallen from her lips, that your visits have been less frequent of late. Count, a love-sick girl thinks a day's absence an age; but I came not to upbraid your dereliction; I am commissioned merely to say, that Adella is in want of money, and that at present it is impossible to draw from the general treasury, which, though rich in plate and jewels, is, at this crisis, low in cash."

Sigesmar drew forth his purse; it contained a few pieces of gold. "Hasten to her with this," said he; "it is all I am now possessed of; but in a few days, a larger sum——"

Gustrow put back the extended hand that offered the purse.

"Nay, take it," continued Sigesmar; "in the palace of Meiningen all my necessities are amply supplied, and were it otherwise, to administer to Adella's comforts I would gladly suffer privation."

"Count Dusseldorf," resumed Gustrow, "you have now been inaugurated into the *Order of Retribution* some months; it is impossible you can forget with what alacrity the knights, one and all, espoused your revenge upon the saintly hypocrites of the Carthusian monastery; not a foot but hasted to complete your vengeance; not a dagger but was unsheathed in your cause. You perhaps will say they were rewarded by the rich plunder of the monastery. In reply to this I answer, it is a dangerous reward; that plunder has not yet been converted into cash; the silver saints and precious relics lie buried under the cavern of the forest, and must, by degrees, pass through many hands, and be conveyed to distant countries; and much time must necessarily elapse before the fraternity can reap the benefit of that exploit."

Sigesmar listened in silent and horrible suspense for the termination of this harangue.

"Briefly, count, it is known to the *Secret Avengers*, who have spies every where,

that the prince of Altenberg has this day received a large sum of gold, which is deposited in an ebony cabinet in his bedchamber."

The almost-suffocated Sigesmar with difficulty articulated, " And what have I to do with that ?"

" You are required," answered Gustrow, " to proceed immediately with me, and dislodge this treasure, which the members have occasion for."

" Impossible !" said Sigesmar ; " enter the bedchamber of the prince of Altenberg !—turn midnight robber !—never !"

" Yet I recollect," rejoined Gustrow, coolly, " when, to obtain Adella, you swore to be any thing the fraternity required—a robber, an assassin—you cannot have forgot your oath, count, or the terrible penalty."

Sigesmar tore open the magnificent vest that covered his bosom, and advancing to Gustrow, bade him strike his dagger to his heart.

Gustrow, unmoved by his frantic beha-

viour, asked him, whether or not he would proceed with him to the chamber of the prince of Altenberg?

"Do you not reflect," said Sigesmar, "that he is your prince—your noble, your munificent master?"

"His munificence," replied Gustrow, "is the mere reward of my services; were I by sickness, or accident, rendered less useful to him, he would be less liberal.—Will you accompany me to his chamber?"

"I cannot, will not be a robber," said Sigesmar; "kill me, I conjure you, and spare me this dishonour."

"A punishment more terrible than death awaits your refusal: you are acquainted with the penalty your refusal incurs."

Saying this Gustrow calmly advanced towards the mirror, on which he laid his fingers to press down the spring. "I go," continued he, "to denounce you; in the mean time, fly if you can, but carry with you this conviction, that no spot on the habitable globe will long conceal you from the *Secret Avengers.*"

Sigesmar caught his arm:—"Stay, I entreat, I conjure you! spare me!" said he; "the prince of Altenberg has been, on all occasions, so much my friend!"

"The friendship of the world," replied Gustrow, "have all their private motives; no man serves another but from a sinister design; besides, have you not cause to hate this prince of Altenberg? deep as the passion is buried in your heart, your love for the fair princess Frederica has not escaped my keen observance."

"Surely," thought Sigesmar, as he gazed on the diabolic countenance of Gustrow, and listened to his words, "surely this is no human being, but a devil, who reads my thoughts, and, spite of my resistance, will enforce obedience to his pernicious counsels."

"This man being your rival," continued Gustrow, "to despoil him would be sweet revenge. You have already been a murderer, and can you now hesitate to take from a rich man a little portion of

his superfluous wealth, to add to the comforts of a woman who bears your child in her bosom, and whom, in my presence, you have a thousand times sworn to love for ever?—Adella is in want of cash, count.'

"To-morrow," said Sigesmar, "wait but till to-morrow, and I will borrow."

"The plans of the knights of the *Order of Retribution*, count," replied Gustrow, "wait not upon exigencies; when once digested, are never receded from; either on the instant proceed with me to the cabinet that contains the treasure, or take the consequences of a refusal."

"What if the prince or princess should awake?" said the still-hesitating Sigesmar.

"For that I am prepared," answered Gustrow, "and if murder must be committed, that part of the business be mine."

"Murder!—another murder!" repeated the shuddering Sigesmar.

"If their saints keep but their eyes shut," replied Gustrow, "I have no wish to disturb them."

Saying this he removed the mirror, and drew in the habits and visors he had provided for the expedition.

"Fate," said Sigesmar, as he drew on the disguise, "Fate, thou hast shot thy last bolt; no lower can thy malice sink the degraded Dusseldorf."

Still a lingering spark of virtue would have withheld him from the commission of this atrocity; but his dreadful oath, and its still more horrible penalty, extinguished the last faint beam; and from that hour Sigesmar bade an eternal adieu to remorse, stifled the upbraidings of conscience, and hardened his heart to the commission of every crime that promised to facilitate his wishes. With cautious step he followed Gustrow through the opening presented by the unclosed mirror; after winding round the building, they entered by a sliding pannel a dressing-room adjoining the bedchamber of the prince of Altenberg. Here they paused, to listen if they were hushed in sleep. Gustrow, finding all still, presented Sigesmar with a key,

and a peculiarly-constructed lamp, which he had hitherto borne himself.

Desperation now lent the devoted Dusseldorf courage. With noiseless step he passed round the bed that held the happy Altenberg and his lovely Frederica, both locked in peaceful slumbers. With a trembling hand he opened the cabinet, and possessed himself of the purses that contained the gold, while the daring villain Gustrow stood with a pistol in each hand, keeping guard over the unconscious pair. Again Sigesmar closed the cabinet, but in his retreat the visor fell from his face; in his hurry and agitation, he forgot to turn the lamp, which flashing, as he stooped to raise the visor, full on the eyes of the princess, she started up, and caught a momentary glance of the pale distorted countenance of Sigesmar. A shriek of terror from Frederica, the concealing of the light, and the escape of the depredators, was the work of an instant.

The count hastily regained his apartment, which lay in a distant quarter of the

palace, secured the pannel, and flung himself into bed, while all was confusion in the apartment of the prince of Altenberg, who, awakened by the cries of Frederica, had listened to her terrified recital of seeing a man by her bedside, with tender incredulity, himself believing her deceived and alarmed by a dream. He however instantly summoned his attendants, searched the suit of apartments, but nothing appearing to corroborate the assertion of the princess, every person concluded she had been frightened by a dream, and into this belief Frederica herself was at length persuaded. The face she had seen resembled, she thought, the countenance of Sigesmar; but this she did not mention, out of respect to his feelings and character; for what but the wildness of a dream could bring count Dusseldorf to their bedchamber. Soothed by this conclusion, the innocent princess contented herself with fastening the doors of her apartments, smiled at what she termed her ridiculous alarm, and sunk again on the

bosom of her enraptured husband into peaceful forgetfulness.

In the course of the following day the prince of Altenberg discovered the loss he had sustained, and was now convinced that Frederica's alarm had been occasioned by more than a dream. Fearful of intimidating the princess, he kept silence with her respecting his loss, which was considerable, and necessitated him to form an excuse for going in person to Altenberg Castle, to raise a fresh supply.

Frederica would gladly have quitted the gaieties of Dresden to accompany her husband, but the winter had set in severely; and, added to the inconvenience attending travelling at that inclement season, she was in a state of pregnancy, and both the wishes of her husband and brother influenced her to remain in safety at the palace of her ancestors.

It chanced at the bottom of one of the purses taken by Sigesmar from the cabinet of the prince of Altenberg, was a cu-

rious ring, an antique of the empress Faustina, which had been for time immemorial in the cabinets of the Altenberg family. This ring (when the purses were by the count emptied into the lap of Adella) had, with some of the gold, fallen to the ground, and it was not till a few days afterwards discovered by her in the corner of her chamber, where it had rolled. Unsuspicious of its being part of the treasure pillaged from the prince of Altenberg she placed the ring on her finger, with the intention of questioning Sigesmar and Gustrow, at their next visit, respecting it.

Being in hourly expectation of the arrival of Theresa, allured by the fineness of the morning, Adella strolled out to meet her, and had not left the city more than half a league behind, when she was overtaken by a gentleman on horseback, who requested to know the distance to a monastery that lay at the foot of a mountain which overhung the road. Adella, on raising her eyes, beheld the prince of Al-

tenberg, with count Wolmar, and their attendants. In the dress of a peasant, which Adella wore, she appeared uncommonly attractive; and the eyes of the count Wolmar were wandering, unrestrained, over the beauties of her person; but the gaze of the prince of Altenberg was rivetted on the ring which encircled the finger with which she pointed to the path that wound round the base of the mountain to the monastery, concerning which he had interrogated her. At the first glance the prince recognised and remembered where he had placed the ring. Suddenly dismounting from his horse, he took her hand, and demanded how she became possessed of the jewel?

Adella, always mistress of herself, answered with the utmost composure, that she had that moment picked it up, and if it belonged to him, she was glad she had not injured it by treading on it, which she was very near doing. She then drew the ring from her finger, and presenting it to the prince, added, "I placed it on my

finger, with the hope that it would be owned."

The prince thankfully received the ring, and would have given her his purse in exchange; but she refused to accept it, saying she had no right to be paid for doing her duty.

The account which Adella gave of finding the ring entirely satisfied the unsuspicious Altenberg, who readily believed she had found it on the road, where, it was probable, it had been thrown by the robber, who had feared to keep so remarkable a jewel. After having in vain pressed Adella to accept some recompence, he again expressed his thanks, assuring her, if at any future period she should want assistance, she might be certain of meeting a friend in the prince of Altenberg.

Not so satisfied was count Wolmar; he saw in the air and manners of Adella a something not consonant with the humble garb of a peasant, and he strongly suspected that she was connected with the robber,

or robbers; and full of this idea, he determined, if possible, to make the important discovery. After the prince of Altenberg had mounted his horse, he continued to converse with her; expressed his admiration of her beauty, and requested to know where he might again meet her.

The repulsive replies of Adella by no means weakened his suspicions; and he at last declared he would attend her to her home, for he considered her too lovely to be exposed to the dangers of a public road.

Adella calmly seated herself on the trunk of a fallen tree: "I am not in the habit of taking strangers to my humble cabin; particularly," added she, "great lords, which might expose me to the ill-treatment of a jealous husband; and I think it is but a poor return for my having found and restored the prince his ring, to be so molested, and hindered from pursuing my business."

This was both reproach and appeal to the feelings of the noble Altenberg, who

condemned the behaviour of the volatile Wolmar; he apologized to Adella, and by clapping spurs to his own horse, compelled the count to follow him. Frequently he turned to look at the graceful peasant, till a winding in the road shut her from his view; he then freely expressed his sentiments respecting her being no stranger to the circumstances of the robbery; "for, beautiful as she is," continued the count, "I could discern in her countenance the curves, lines, and angles, of villanous deception, the lurking vestiges of vice and——"

"Thank Heaven," interrupted the prince, "I am no reader of countenances; I should hate, while I examined a beautiful set of features, to discover marks of depravity. The female we have just parted from appeared, in my eyes, not only lovely, but innocent; her tale of finding the ring was probable, and told without any of the hesitation or confusion of guilt."

"True," replied count Wolmar, "and

it was her unvarying complexion, and firm tone of voice, which your highness commends, that in my judgment signs her absolute condemnation. I wish from my soul——" He paused.

The prince smiled—"You wish she had allowed you to be better acquainted with her: come, come, Wolmar," said he, "you think her vicious, only because you desire to make her so."

"No, on my honour," replied the count, "beautiful as she is, my only wish respecting her was, that we had watched her to her habitation, for the sole purpose of discovering whether that ring would not have proved a clue to the robbery."

On their return to the Meiningen palace, the prince of Altenberg related the adventure of the morning, and produced the ring. While the count Wolmar described the person of the peasant, and recounted his own suspicions, Sigesmar walked to the window, fearful that his countenance would not be subject to the command that Adella had gained over hers; but when the count

Wolmar turned towards him, and wished to engage him in the discovery of the habitation of the charming peasant, he rallied his retreating spirits, and affected to believe, as the prince of Altenberg did, that the female was innocent, and that it would be an outrage on humanity, a flagrant breach of gratitude, to molest a person who had acted with such apparent honesty.

The prince of Meiningen agreed with the sentiments of Sigesmar, and added, "A female, be her situation in life what it may, is entitled to respect; I therefore am against an insult being offered in any shape, and particularly in this instance, where the person, as Dusseldorf justly observes, acted with such apparent honesty."

Count Wolmar was on the point of replying, but the princess Frederica at that moment entering the saloon, the prince her husband laid his finger on his lips, and a new subject was immediately started. She being now far gone in pregnancy, it was his wish that she might continue in the per-

suasion that the face she had encountered on that eventful night was the mere coinage of a dream, and that every circumstance relative to the robbery should be concealed from her, as it was now too certain that the person she had seen was the robber, and the delicacy of her present situation required that her mind should be kept in a state of tranquillity.

In the course of the day, count Wolmar again described to Sigesmar the person of Adella, and endeavoured to engage him that night in the discovery of her habitation. "I feel persuaded," said Wolmar, "that this peasant is a person of more importance than her humble habiliments bespeak; she had an air, a tone of command."

"Some princess in disguise, perhaps," rejoined Sigesmar, ironically.

"Not so," replied the count, "but I suspect the mistress of a leader of freebooters; but should it prove otherwise, her beauty is a temptation that would induce a man to encounter some trifling

inconvenience, such as deserting his bed for a night or two, or running some small risk to possess it."

Again he urged Sigesmar, when the company separated for the night, to accompany him on a ramble to the quarter of the city at whose outskirts they had met the fair object of his suspicion.

"For my own part," added he, "I am determined to begin a search after her, and nothing but death shall prevent my suspicions being justified, or my gaining possession of her person."

"And this," said Sigesmar, "is your resolve?"

"From which," replied Wolmar, "while I have life, I will never recede."

After a pause of deliberation, Dusseldorf assented to his scheme, and appointed a place of meeting near the Carmelite monastery.

Sigesmar saw, that count Wolmar's suspicions being excited, he would never rest till he had discovered the habitation of Adella; this, on many accounts, was dan-

gerous, therefore to be avoided; he pondered some time on the means of guarding against what he considered an impending and certain evil, and only one method seemed to promise the security of himself and Adella, whose situation had again roused the dormant fire in his bosom; and he now beheld Wolmar with the eyes of a jealous lover, and determined to secure Adella from being subjected to his solicitations, or yielding to his flattery.

The next morning, when the party met at breakfast, count Wolmar was absent; on sending to his chamber, it appeared that he had not been in bed. The prince of Meiningen made some sportive remarks on his absence; the prince of Altenberg appeared uneasy, and several times expressed a wish for his safety and return. The meal was not concluded, when a monk from the Carmelite monastery requested audience of the prince of Meiningen. He was introduced, and at once ended all expectation of count Wolmar's return, by announcing his *murder*.

The monk related, that his convent was, that morning, just at the peep of day, disturbed by loud and repeated ringings at the bell, when the porter, on throwing open the gate, discovered a man weltering in his blood. In a few moments the brotherhood assembled, and with horror recognised, in the mangled form before them, count Wolmar! "Perceiving that he was not yet dead——"

"Not dead!" reiterated Sigesmar.

"No, my lord," replied the monk; "we discovered a pulsation about the heart, and immediately staunched the blood which flowed from a large wound in his bosom; we then gave him a cordial draught, and he recovered his speech."

Sigesmar reeled against the prince of Altenberg, who, seeing his eyes roll wildly, and his face paler than marble, would have led him from the room, conceiving that the hearing of count Wolmar's murder too powerfully affected him, as they had appeared to be attached friends; but Sigesmar in an instant collected hisspirits, and in

an hollow tone, said, "No, I remain, though his confession annihilates me."

"With a dying hand," continued the monk, "the count beckoned me; he bade me haste to the Meiningen palace, and denounce the robber of the prince of Altenberg, and his murderer."

"Whom?" shrieked Sigesmar, in the voice of a demon, grasping at the same time, with frantic action, the arm of the terrified monk, "whom did he bid you denounce?"

"Alas!" said the monk, "I was nearly as anxious as you, to learn the name of the villain; but though the count made many efforts, he could not articulate the name; the blood rushed into his throat, and he died in strong convulsions."

A loud terrific laugh, amounting to a yell, burst from Sigesmar—"The grave tells no secrets," murmured from his asby lips, as he fell, deprived of sense and motion, on the floor.

With difficulty he was borne to his chamber, while his situation excited much com-

miseration from all present, who attributed his disorder to his strong feeling for the murdered count, with whom he had lived in all the confidence of youthful friendship.

CHAP. V.

I defy all counsel, all redress,
But that which ends all counsel—true redress—
Death! death!———————
I am not mad: this hair I tear is mine!

KING JOHN.

THE mysterious murder of the unfortunate count Wolmar had not only spread a general consternation and horror at the Meiningen palace, but throughout all Dresden, and had actuated the prince of Altenberg to offer large rewards for the apprehension of the murderer; at the same time, private emissaries were employed to discover the female peasant, from whom he had obtained

his ring; not that his mind could at all implicate or connect her with the robbery, but respect to the memory of a man who had met his death through his zeal for him, demanded that he should investigate even the minutest circumstance that might lead to an elucidation of the horrible transaction. But every inquiry was ineffectual; the murderer of count Wolmar, and the robber of the prince of Altenberg, remained undetected, though it was evident that the unfortunate count had but too fatally succeeded in ascertaining the latter, and that his solicitude to trace the perpetrators of that villanous act had been to the cost of his existence.

Count Wolmar was yet in the spring of life, uniting to a firm, undaunted spirit, a heart full of sensibility and kindness, with a mind ennobled by the most honourable principles. His elegant person, and gay disposition, had made him the favourite of every circle to whom he was known; and many a bright eye and fair bosom bestowed the genuine tear and sigh of sensibility

to his memory, and sincerely lamented his loss; and among his numerous friends, none appeared more seriously affected than count Dusseldorf, who was many days before he recovered the shock conveyed by the monk, in the intelligence of his death, which seemed to give a shade of deeper sadness to his countenance, in spite of all the efforts which he evidently made at cheerfulness. It was now that the prince of Meiningen spoke to him of Rosamund of Brandenburg, who was shortly expected at Dresden.

"My fair cousin," said the prince, "is all gaiety; she will teach Dusseldorf to laugh; she will cure him of his sombre fits; she will make him forget the solemnity of the monastery, and instead of bewildering his brain with the pedantry of the fathers, she will instruct him to trifle agreeably, and whirl a fair lady through the giddy velocity of a waltz."

A few weeks after the murder of count Wolmar, Adella became a mother; but this circumstance, though delightful to her,

seemed not to make a similar impression on the heart of Sigesmar, which was no longer sensible of those poignant sensations which had formerly thrilled its minutest fibres. To Adella his behaviour had become cold; he was no longer the tender, melting adorer; and on her infant he bestowed scarcely any notice; his temper, manners, and disposition, had undergone a wonderful metamorphose; he no longer seemed disgusted at the coarse familiarity of the knights, his brethren in the *Order of Retribution*, from whom he was wont to shrink with the proud feeling of superiority, but listened, with perfect insensibility, to their monstrous relations of deceptions, robberies, and murders, which formerly would have worked his feelings to frenzy. He now applauded the skilful cunning with which their schemes had been arranged and conducted, and the bravery with which their accomplishment had been achieved; entering, with unshuddering nerves, on the minutest particulars, and questioning the relators on the

possibility of committing new villanies. —The voice of conscience was now no longer listened to; remorse seemed no more felt; and that bosom, in which Nature had planted the seeds of every dazzling virtue and heroic principle, had, by improper culture, and combining circumstance, become the corrupt soil, where dauntless vice was nourished, and gained a perfection of turpitude unequalled; for he who might, by proper education, have been the most exemplary character, as well as the first and most magnanimous of heroes, was now stupendous in depravity, and unequalled in villany. His love for Adella was nearly extinct; she no longer excited his desires, or awakened his jealousy; his eyes, full of melting tenderness, no longer sought, in the beam of hers, to learn the assurance of being the beloved of her soul; he no longer courted her smiles, or evinced, in the ardency of his manner, the tender impassioned lover; on the contrary, in his behaviour towards her, so lately idolized, he was morose, sullen, and repulsive.

This amazing change sensibly wounded the feelings of Adella, still vain of the charms which had ever excited solicitude and adulation: in spite of the levity of her character, and the depravity of her conduct, Sigesmar possessed her affections. Naturally of strong and vehement passions, she loved him with an excess of feeling that felt the deepest mortification and agonizing torture in his coldness. Bitterly she lamented the loss of that unbounded influence she had once possessed over his heart and senses; the spell was dissolved; the witchery of love had ceased: in vain her ivory fingers swept the strings of her lute, and her voice warbled the rich strain of harmony; Sigesmar no longer listened with rapturous attention; unregarded, she folded her glossy raven tresses over her finely-arched eyebrows; Sigesmar no longer gazed with delight on the Grecian contour of her countenance; he was no longer to be inflamed or fascinated by the beauty which his heart had once worshipped, which his eyes had beheld with doting fondness,

and his fancy thought unparalleled: in vain she presented, and offered to his arms, her infant, pointing out its resemblance to himself; as if detesting the unconscious babe, he would scarcely bestow a look upon it, and at all times seemed absolutely indifferent to its fate.

The soul of Sigesmar had become callous to all the finer feelings of humanity; sympathy could awaken no tender throb; Nature excited no thrilling sensibility, created no yearnings of affection towards his offspring; and the disappointed Adelia, while she pressed her disregarded child to her bosom, dropped on its face the tears of insulted pride, and outraged affection, deploring, in an agony of grief, that she was no longer dear to the bosom of him, who, prostrate at her feet, had a thousand times sworn that his heart should never change, that his love should be eternal.

A few weeks previous to the birth of this child, the knights of the *Order of Retribution* had taken possession of a ruined monastery, about a league from Dresden,

situated on a wild heath, which, having many large excavations, and vaulted apartments, under its dilapidated chapel, was, by their contrivance and industry, rendered not only habitable, but commodious. Near this monastery, which lay on the direct road from Gorlitz to Dresden, travellers now feared to pass, having imbibed a notion of the building, and the road near it, being haunted by the spirits of the monks who had, in former days, inhabited the ruined edifice; the superstitious peasants who lived on the adjacent mountains having positively affirmed they saw lights stream from the decayed windows, and when they had passed near the monastery, after night, they had heard strange noises, for which no natural cause could be conceived or assigned. Others, more enlightened, suspected the ruins had been taken possession of by a horde of freebooters, who there concealed themselves from public observance, and from that wild and unfrequented spot could issue, armed with double terrors, on the unwary traveller.

The adopting of either of these notions was, however, sufficient to render the road lonely; and as the monastery was now a spot of universal dislike, a circuitous and far more difficult road, over a steep mountain, at the edge of the heath, was preferred by all who knew any thing from their own actual observance, or had heard any of the extraordinary and terrific reports respecting the ruined monastery.

These marvellous and appalling tales were secretly and assiduously spread abroad among the ignorant and credulous peasants, by the knights themselves, when, in various disguises, they mingled with them in the neighbouring villages, who, when assembled, and relating their adventures over their brimming goblets of Rhenish, laughed heartily at the unsuspecting simplicity that could swallow the monstrous, improbable, and extravagant legends they had been at the pains to invent; though, at the same time, they felt and acknowledged the promulgation and belief in these fictions

secured them the undisturbed possession of their habitation.

At the Meiningen palace, all now was congratulation and rejoicing; the murder of the count Wolmar was forgot in the happy event of the princess Frederica presenting her enraptured husband with a daughter. From the prince, down to the lowest domestic, every face was bright with smiles, and every tongue praised Heaven for the safety of the princess, and the birth of her lovely child, on whom a thousand tender caresses were bestowed by the delighted family. Nothing seemed wanting to the happiness of the young and beautiful mother, while she nourished at her own pure bosom the smiling image of her adored and adoring Altenberg. The child, immediately after its birth, was baptized Orilla, after the mother of the princess, and the most sumptuous preparations were making for a public christening, at which the baroness of Rosenheim, who some months before had given that illustrious house an heir, together with many of

the first nobility of Saxony, were expected. The palace of Meiningen had been many days in all the hurry and bustle of adornment and arrangement for the reception of the expected guests; and this preparation had, in no small degree, pervaded the suit of apartments occupied by the princess of Altenberg, who, with fond maternal solicitude, wished to present to her sister the future bride of her son, in all the splendid decorations that tenderness, fancy, and wealth, could possibly devise to ornament infancy.

At a late hour, the lovely Frederica consigned her babe to the care of the nurse, with whom it slept, in an adjoining chamber, with its other attendants, and resigned herself to the delightful thought of the next day beholding her beloved sister, and caressing her boy, while she placed in her arms the little Orilla. Full of these blissful hopes, she sunk into the peaceful slumber of innocence.

Early on that morning which was expected to bring the happy sisters to each

other's embrace, a scene of the utmost distress and confusion took place in the apartment of the attendants of the infant princess. The chief nurse, Richilda, was waked by the cries of her charge; her surprise and consternation cannot be described, when she found lying beside her a child entirely naked. Scarcely giving credit to the evidence of her eyes, she hastily threw aside the curtains of her bed, and perceived that the child so mysteriously placed beside her was of a much darker complexion, and far stronger features, than the little Orilla, who had disappeared; nor did its left shoulder bear the five dark spots, in the form of a crescent, which its fond mother had kissed a thousand times, observing, that the baroness Rosenheim had a similar mark on her bosom.

Terrified beyond measure, the half-distracted Richilda awoke the attendants, who still slept, unconscious of the evil that was to salute their opening eyes. With the same feelings of horror with which she related, they listened to the amazing tale she

communicated of the change, that, during the night, had taken place, and the state of absolute nakedness in which she had found the child, which they all examined, and with one voice agreed it bore not the smallest resemblance, either in feature or complexion, to the infant princess; but when, or how, she had been spirited away, or by whom the exchange of children had been made, or to what intent, they could form no conjecture.

The lamp yet continued burning, and several articles of value were laid upon a table in the apartment, where every thing remained exactly as they had left it when they retired to rest. For some moments the bewildered women gazed upon each other, powerless to speak or move. At length, Isadora, a young woman of Bohemia, declared her absolute belief that this wonderful occurrence had been effected by sorcery, that the princess Orilla had been conveyed away by magic, and that the one left was an imp, or child of witchcraft; to discover which, she advised its

being plunged into a running stream, when the spell would instantly dissolve.

Eager to try this experiment, and prove how far they were imposed upon by sorcery, they flew to the bottom of the palace garden, and plunged the child into a stream that flowed amidst its flowery banks; but after several times immersing, the babe, who seemed as if used to be so bathed, still appeared the same, and the credulous Richilda and her fellows returned to their apartments, believing the child was human, though evidently not the little Orilla. The next perplexity that seized the mind of these unhappy women was, in what manner to convey this harrowing intelligence to the doting parents. To a certainty they believed it would destroy the mother, who idolized the infant. Before this point could be decided, a fresh alarm arose, what would be their own fates, in this distressful business; would not all the blame be imputed to their negligence, who were deputed to watch over the health and safety of the precious babe? and was it not

likely that death, or some more dreadful punishment, would await their having failed in their duty ?

Again an agonizing pause ensued, when, after deliberating, in extreme agitation, Richilda said, " Self-preservation is a law written by nature on our hearts. Heaven knows, I would gladly endure punishment, would it restore the lovely babe, or tranquillize the mind of its mother; but as this is not to be effected, we must provide for our own safety, by immediately dressing this child, belong to whom it may, in the robes of the vanished Orilla, and one and all must resolve, with steady countenances, to persuade the princess of Altenberg that the complexions and features of all new-born infants undergo a change, and that marks seldom remain on the skin after a child is a month old."

To this fabrication they one and all agreed ; solemnly swearing, never by look, or dropping the slightest hint, to betray the imposition their own safety urged them

to accede to, but zealously to join in persuading the princess, and the whole household, that this was actually the infant Orilla of Altenberg.

Immediately the stranger was dressed, and when the princess rang her bell, was conveyed to her arms by the trembling Richilda. Frederica was yet in bed, the curtains of her windows were closed, and, unsuspicious of any deception, she caressed the child, who eagerly imbibed the offered nourishment. The princess then dismissed Richilda, and with the head of the infant on her bosom, sunk again into an unconscious slumber.

This circumstance, of the princess retaining the child, was unusual, and the yet trembling attendants hailed it as an instance of particular good fortune on their sides; her having received the child from their care, caressed, and placed it at the bosom, would, they hoped and believed, perfectly exonerate them, when the momentous and dreaded discovery should be made.

About an hour had elapsed in fearful expectancy, when the violent ringing of the princess's bell threw them into the utmost agitation; but in a few moments Richilda collecting her spirits, bade them compose themselves.

"Remember," said she, "our lives hang on a thread; let us beware how we decree ourselves death, by letting confusion or fear betray a knowledge, or deter from pursuing the conduct I have advised."

Saying this, she repaired to the bedside of the princess, who having thrown back her curtains, with a wild look of terror was gazing on the unconscious babe that lay in a sweet and tranquil sleep beside her.

At the approach of Richilda, she demanded where her infant was, and whose child she had brought to her arms?

Affecting all the composure of ignorance, Richilda replied, she did not comprehend her highness.

"Look there," said the agonized princess, "look there, and read my meaning; tell me, is that my cherub Orilla?"

Richilda looked at the child, as she was commanded, and calmly answered, " Certainly it is the infant princess; your highness is pleased to jest this morning—who else should it be but your child, the princess Orilla?"

" Woman! woman!" repeated Frederica, " make me not mad."

She then called loudly for her attendants in the outer room, to whom she appealed, one by one; from whom she received the same answer, that the infant beside her was undoubtedly the princess Orilla.

" By whom my angel child is removed, or for what purpose this infant is brought hither, I know not," resumed the distracted mother, " but Heaven will one day avenge me on you, cruel, inhuman women —you know my babe was snowy fair, this child is brown; you know also my infant had a crescent on its ivory shoulder, this child has no such mark—away with the impostor—hence with it from my sight—restore me my Orilla—have compassion on

a mother's breaking heart—bring back to my doting eyes my precious cherub!"

In vain the attendants persisted in its being the infant princess, and argued on the constant change of complexion, and the frequent disappearance of marks; the princess remained unconvinced, and, wrought up to frenzy, absolutely refused to acknowledge the child for hers, or to nourish it; and having summoned her husband and brother to her apartment, in the most solemn and affecting manner endeavoured to impress them with the belief that the child before them was not hers; but that for some purpose known only to themselves, her babe had been conveyed away, and that strange child imposed upon her.

The princes, her husband and brother, had several times pressed their lips on the forehead and cheek of the babe, as it lay in the arms of its lovely mother, but it was yet too young to engage their particular attention; they had also frequently heard, that not only the skins, but features of children materially altered in the first

days of infancy; they therefore united to persuade the weeping Frederica, that the babe she disavowed was, in reality, her own offspring, and that it appeared absolute insanity to doubt it.

"Beloved Altenberg," replied the princess, "this is not our child. Brother, dearest brother, this is not your niece. You look incredulous; but though you think I utter madness, still do I call Heaven to attest this child is not my babe—the image of my Altenberg—my Orilla—oh! would to Heaven that I were mad, then should I cease to agonize with apprehension for the fate of my infant! then should I cease to lament its loss!"

Deeply affected by the distress of his wife, the prince of Altenberg, aided by the prince of Meiningen, and count Dusseldorf, strictly and minutely examined the nurses and attendants; but as no reason whatever appeared, after the closest investigation, to suppose that an exchange of children could possibly have been made, and as their accounts of constant attendance ex-

actly corresponded, though examined separately, the prince of Altenberg rested in perfect security that no imposition had been practised, and was, as well as the prince of Meiningen, satisfied that the child was his, and that the change of its complexion from fair to brown, and also the disappearance of the mark from its shoulder, was all in the customary order, and according to the course of nature.

But in vain was every argument of reason or consolation offered to the disconsolate Frederica; for what can deceive the eye of a mother? She recoiled in aversion, amounting to horror, from the infant presented as hers. Even the tender soothings and persuasions of her beloved Altenberg failed to calm or reconcile the lovely mourner; and before the arrival of her sister, she was under the delirium of a fever, and to the approach of this fever her physicians attributed her strange prepossession of the child not being hers; assuring the afflicted prince of Altenberg that the first attack of the disorder was on

the nerves and brain: thus confirming his belief of the child being really their offspring, notwithstanding her vehement protestations to the contrary, and horror at the sight of the poor babe, who was now doubly caressed by the deluded princes, and the household.

The arrival of the baroness Rosenheim, with her lord and suit, relieved in a considerable degree the afflicted mind of Altenberg, who hoped, when the fever should be subdued, of which the physicians spoke in terms of hope, that the gentle, affectionate heart of Frederica would recognise the little innocent, and that the reasonings of her sister would effectually remove any scruples she might entertain, respecting the change of its complexion and the loss of the mark.

The affectionate, commiserating Adelaide flew to the couch of her suffering sister, who, in the paroxysms of her disorder, still wildly raved for her lost infant—still made heart-rending appeals to Heaven, to discover the perpetrators of the atrocious

act, and denounced the heaviest vengeance on all concerned in the exchange of the children.

The baroness Rosenheim beheld with the tenderest pity the innocent cause of this distressful scene; she also remarked its dark skin, and features differently formed to either the prince of Altenberg or Frederica; yet she knew, that frequently children bore no resemblance to either of their parents; and that the nurses and attendants should be in a plot to impose a spurious infant on the ancient and illustrious families of Altenberg and Meiningen, seemed an act of villany too daring for belief, particularly to be effected by females whose characters had never, in any instance, been impeached, and whose attachment to the princess Frederica, about whose person they had been for years, had ever appeared most sincere. One day, speaking of the complexion of the infant princess, the baroness Rosenheim recollected that her aunt, the duchess of Brandenburgh,

was a brunette, and that Rosamund, their cousin, was remarkably fair.

The prince of Meiningen observed, it was probable the child might resemble the duchess, whom he remembered to have heard called the olive beauty; and it would be well, when Frederica was capable of attending, to remind her of the complexion of her aunt of Brandenburgh.

It was now discovered, with no little consternation, that the princess of Altenberg had the small pox; the infant had also sickened with the same disorder. It was covered with pustules, and the attendants were now elate with hope, that the distemper spreading its ravages over the infant's face, would entirely complete the deception, and, should the princess of Altenberg recover, reconcile her effectually to the change in its features and complexion. It was evident to the attendants that the infection had been conveyed to the princess by the child, on whom the disorder first appeared; and they now shuddered to think they might have murdered the poor

infant, by plunging it, as they had repeatedly done, in cold water.

Contrary to their expectations, it bore the disorder well, nor did any marks appear upon it, except a redness, which soon wore off, and left its face uninjured and unaltered.

The suffering, interesting Frederica slowly recovered health; her beauty was unimpaired, but it was long before she could bear the sight of the child; and when at length the tender arguments of her adoring husband, and the mild, but impressive reasonings of the baroness Rosenheim induced her to caress it, while she kissed its rosy lips, floods of tears fell on its face; her heart trembled; and while the natural tenderness of her disposition felt a tender compassion for the helpless, unoffending babe, she experienced an internal conviction that it was not her offspring; and though compelled by imperious circumstance to affect a composure she did not possess, she yet bitterly lamented her own Orilla; and though forced to acknowledge

this child, she was conscious it was a stranger to her blood, and that, in whatever light considered by her family, she knew the child to be an impostor, and felt the utter impossibility of its possessing her affection. Though thus mysteriously thrown upon her protection, she considered it her duty to treat it with kindness, provide against all its wants, and, as it grew up, to attend to its education, nor let it perceive the absence of maternal tenderness.

Thus thinking and resolving, Frederica ceased to afflict and disturb the bosoms of her relatives, by disowning the child, on whom Nature had bestowed much personal loveliness. Its eyes were black and sparkling, and the bright carnation of its downy cheek often received the kiss of affection from the lip of Altenberg, who beheld with paternal pride and exultation the unfolding beauty of his little brunette. In the public eye, Frederica appeared satisfied that the child was hers; but when escaped from observation, in the retirement of her chamber, her tears fell copiously;

her thoughts dwelt on the rosy softness, the dimpled beauty of her little Orilla, her own cherub, whose fate was the constant subject of her meditations, concerning which she could not even conjecture, nor by whom spirited away, or to what distant spot conveyed. Constantly were her prayers directed to Heaven for the safety of her child, and its restoration to her hereditary rights, and the affection of her father, usurped by another.

Richilda had been about the person of the princess from infancy, and had ever possessed her confidence and regard; and that she, her most favoured attendant, should join in this horrible deception, was a shock dreadful to her feelings, as it entirely destroyed the confidence which she had hitherto reposed in her. No longer able to bear the presence of Richilda, the princess gave her a marriage portion, and she retired with her husband to a distant province; the rest of the attendants were also dismissed the palace, and new ones appointed; but the mind of Frederica felt

not more tranquil for this arrangement; she was in perpetual dread of some other terrific event succeeding, which might deprive her of her husband, or some of her nearest and dearest relatives or connexions; nor were the new'y-appointed nurses and attendants more at ease; for the exchange of the children, though disbelieved by the household in general, was a tale that made no small impression on their minds, who had frequent opportunities of observing the deep melancholy of the princess, when retired to the privacy of her own chamber, and the cold kindness of her manner towards the child, so totally different from the doting fondness which they had heard marked her behaviour on the birth of the infant princess, whom she had insisted on nurturing at her own bosom.

By these remarks, the feelings and apprehensions of the attendants were most painfully excited, and at length brought them to the determination, that one part should watch while the others slept; and by thus alternately keeping guard, prevent

any future event from involving them in trouble, or adding fresh sorrow to the already deeply afflicted princess of Altenberg.

Every night they watched, in terrible expectation of some supernatural appearance or event, equally appalling, taking place; and thus, at the peaceful hour of midnight, while the rest of the inhabitants of Meiningen palace enjoyed the blessings of refreshing and undisturbed sleep, the unhappy Frederica and her attendants started from short slumbers, and gazed and listened with palpitating hearts, in fearful expectancy of some evil, to which their bewildered imaginations could neither give form nor name.

In the mean time, the christening of the little impostor had taken place, with all the magnificence suitable to the birth of a daughter of two such noble houses. The baroness Rosenheim felt the tenderest commiseration for the poor child, for she perceived, though it was passionately beloved by its father, and the prince of Meiningen, its uncle, yet it was far, very far

from possessing the warm affection of its mother, who, though she caressed it, from the penetrating eyes of Adelaide could not conceal the coldness, nay, repugnance with which the effort to fondle or notice the unfortunate child was made; nay, she could observe her turn pale when it was brought into her presence, and shudder when she took it in her arms. These circumstances made her wish to take the infant princess with her to Rosenheim; and having consulted on the measure with the baron her husband, she one day, when the child was present, made the proposal, under the pretence of bringing her up with her future husband, the young baron, who already evinced a fondness for, and would hold out his beautiful rosy mouth to kiss his no less handsome cousin.

To this scheme Frederica gladly acceded, happy to be released from the irksome task of appearing fond of an object which only excited unconquerable dislike, and renewed the agonizing remembrance of a lost cherub.

The prince of Altenberg hoped that time and absence would operate to remove an unhappy prejudice, which he perceived his beloved wife still nourished, though she laboured to make him believe she no longer lamented, or retained a belief respecting Orilla not being her child; but though she had ceased to weep in his presence, or to mention the painful subject, yet her restless nights, and the exclamations she uttered in her sleep, convinced him the torturing idea still remained with undiminished force, and that whatever his child had to expect from the naturally amiable disposition and justice of its mother, the unfortunate innocent had nothing to hope from maternal tenderness; he therefore consented, though with evident sorrow and reluctance, to place the child under the auspices of its aunt, the princess Adelaide of Rosenheim, till natural affection should again rekindle in the heart of its mother, and prompt its recall to the palace of its ancestors.

The baron of Rosenheim, whom affairs

of consequence had obliged to quit Dresden, a few days previous to the departure of the baroness, was, by the prince of Altenberg, the prince of Meiningen, count Dusseldorf, and other of their remaining guests, accompanied a few leagues on his way, which gave the baroness an opportunity of conversing on a subject which affected her painfully, and which she knew Frederica was ever averse to entering upon, her strange dislike of her own offspring.

"Adelaide," said the princess of Altemberg, "the closest, tenderest bond of affection has ever united us; we were brought up together; did you ever observe in me a capricious disposition, or want of tenderness towards my relatives or friends?"

The baroness confessed, that her nature had ever been kind, gentle, and affectionate, her principles honourable, and her temper unwavering.

"What now then," resumed Frederica, "should tempt you to believe that I would, monster like, deny my own offspring?"

Heaven," continued she, sinking on her knees, "Heaven, to whom I now solemnly appeal, knows that child was never borne in my bosom. Adelaide," said she, rising and opening a cabinet, from whence she drew an unfinished portrait, "look on these features; do you recognise these brilliant eyes, the rich ruby of these lips?"

"Certainly I do," replied the astonished baroness; "this portrait is the exact resemblance of——"

"Hush," said the princess, hastily returning it to the cabinet; "mention not the name—oh, Adelaide! my sister, my friend! I have longed for this moment of dear and tender confidence; to you I may breathe my suspicions. Examine the features of this child, and then tell me do they not exactly resemble the original of that portrait?"

The baroness passed into the nursery; she took the little Orilla in her arms; her eye dwelt for a moment on its face; that moment was sufficient to convince her the

resemblance her sister had pointed out was indeed more than fancy—but what was she to infer from that?

Again she sought the apartment of her sister, whom she found bitterly weeping.

"I ask not the result of your visit, Adelaide," said she, "for I read in the expression of your countenance that your opinion coincides with mine. You remember the face I mentioned to you, as having seen beside my bed—delicacy forbade my saying whom my terrified fancy thought it resembled, but that, I am now convinced, was no dream—oh no; the person I then saw—the monster who has stolen my cherub Orilla—and the father of this impostor, is the same person."

"Give not way," replied the baroness, "to the wildness of supposition; a likeness has been known to exist between persons of different nations, who have never met; condemn not on mere conjecture. Reflect, dearest Frederica, how much the promulgation of these suspicions may tend to injure the fortune of a man, who, after

all, may be guiltless, even in thought, of these heinous charges."

"They never shall, they never can injure him," replied the princess; "for, buried in my agonizing bosom, my tongue has never uttered them till this moment."

The baroness remained some moments in profound thought; at length she said, "Men are seldom villains from nature; their atrocities are in general the offspring of direful necessity, or the incitements of revenge, neither of which causes can possibly instigate the person whom your suspicions implicate."

"Reflect, Adelaide," resumed Frederica, "reflect; is there no cause which might, in a vindictive mind, engender hatred and revenge?"

"I never yet considered his a vindictive mind," replied the baroness; "he has been greatly injured, it is true, but not by us. Suffer not, I beseech you, my beloved Frederica, suffer not your thoughts to do his noble disposition this most flagrant wrong; remember the siege of Ro-

senheim; where slept the revenge you hint at then; was not his conduct brave, noble, godlike? Let not grief make my Frederica ungrateful—you cannot, sure, forget the preserver of your——"

"No," interrupted Frederica, "I remember all, but never did my eye rest on his countenance but I read what my heart shuddered at the interpretation of—I acknowledge all the services he has rendered our family, but still, my Adelaide, I wish that we had never known him; my prophetic spirit tells me his introduction to our notice was in an evil hour, and dearly shall we pay the obligations that we owe him; already I am marked his victim; on me his revenge begins; for well I know, in his grasp, my helpless dove, my cherub Orilla is held."

"It is impossible," replied the baroness; "he has no friends, except our own family, no acquaintance but what has been formed under our own eyes; endeavour, dearest Frederica, to vanquish this extravagant chimera that haunts your brain:

consult your reason, my sister, and do more justice to an unfortunate but exalted character."

Frederica threw herself into the arms of her sister, and wept bitterly; at length she said, "I would to Heaven you had seen my infant, Adelaide, then would you be certain that no chimera haunts my brain, no prejudice clothes my reason; my child was beautifully fair; your bosom yet retains the crescent, which I remember to have heard our adored mother say was hereditary in her family; the left shoulder of my child bore the same mark; why should it disappear from thence, when you, my sister, still retain it? Take with you, my Adelaide, this unfortunate, innocent impostor; though I cannot love it, knowing it to be a stranger to my blood, yet I feel for it; that child, no doubt, has a mother, who, like me, weeps and deplores its loss; you will be kind to it, but beware, Adelaide, how you affiance it to your son; Heaven will be moved with my prayers—Heaven will listen to the anguished groans of a

mother—a day may arrive when this mystery shall be unravelled, when you will be convinced I utter not frenzies, and the real Orilla of Altenberg may be the bride of Xavier of Rosenheim."

CHAP. VI.

She was beauty's self. SHAKESPEARE.

THE expected arrival of Rosamund of Brandenburgh delayed the departure of the princess Adelaide, who, though anxious to return to Rosenheim, yet ardently wished to embrace a relative whom she had not seen since the days of childhood, but whose well-remembered vivacity she dwelt on with secret satisfaction, trusting that her gaiety would contribute to amuse the mind of Frederica, and dispel the dangerous melancholy in which she indulged, by obliging her to go more abroad; as well as by at-

tracting to the Meiningen palace the young and gay of both sexes, who would continually project diversions, and constrain the princess of Altenberg, by taking an active part in them, to forget the grief which she had suffered to usurp the place of her naturally gay spirits.

The person of Rosamund of Brandenburgh was utterly forgotten by her relatives, for she had been sent, at an early age, to France for education, though they well recollected a little playful romp, endeared to all their memories by a thousand extravagant whims and sportive mischiefs, and still more by a nobleness of spirit and sweetness of temper; the former of which had evinced itself in numberless instances, while the latter had borne, unruffled, the shock of many an untoward accident.

The day was now appointed for her visiting Dresden, and none more anxiously awaited her arrival than count Dusseldorf, who had been taught to expect her hand, as the reward of the services he had ren-

dered the Meiningen family, by which alliance the title of friend would be rendered still dearer, by the sacred bond which would ingraft him on the family tree.

At the close of a summer evening, her carriage entered the gates of the Meiningen palace, and Rosamund of Brandenburgh sprang to the embrace of her delighted relatives, who gazed on her sylphic form and glowing countenance as on some celestial vision; fair she was, as the immortal houri of Mahomet's fabled paradise; her dark blue eyes one moment sparkled with a brilliance that dazzled the beholder, and the next swam in melting softness; her golden hair wandered in mazy rings over a forehead of polished ivory; while her mouth, dimpling with smiles, disclosed teeth, regular and beautiful as rows of pearl.

After her introduction to count Dusseldorf, she remarked, that report, on most occasions, said too much or too little; with respect to his person, it had certainly been correct; but that she yet, after seeing

him, remained undecided whether to consider him a god or a devil. She confessed that his figure was commanding, and his countenance grand, but that his eyes had, in their large orbs, a splendor that pained her to look on, and that there was an indescribable expression in his handsome countenance, which she could not behold without a certain degree of awe, very like fear.

These observations being made to the baroness of Rosenheim, she took the opportunity of relating at large the history of Ulric, count Dusseldorf, his infatuated and fanatic father; expatiated on the monastic education Sigesmar had received; and dwelt with grateful prolixity on the services his bravery had rendered their family, by his conquest of the unnatural Gotha, and the preservation of their beloved Frederica from the conflagration at Rosenheim.

"Such a history as this," replied the lively Rosamund, "exalts him to a demi-

god. I know not how it is, but a tale of valorous achievement has a wonderful effect on the weak heart of a woman; I shall be inclined to fall in love."

"And if you do, dear Rosamund," interrupted the baroness, hastily, "it will meet the entire approbation of the family, who would rejoice to pay the debt of gratitude they owe count Dusseldorf, with the rich treasure of your love."

"Not so hasty in your conclusions, dear Adelaide," rejoined she; "but understand me properly; I mean I shall be inclined to love his bravery, as there happens to be nothing in his person to attract me; he will never do for a lover; he is far too solemn; I have never yet seen him smile; and then those large flashing eyes of his—on my conscience, cousin, I am afraid to encounter them, for I am actually persuaded, with a single glance he would read all that passes in my mind."

"And if he should," rejoined the baroness, "I am persuaded my Rosamund has

no thought she would be ashamed to confess."

"I have a little secret or two, though," replied she, laughing, "that I have no wish to reveal to him."

From this, and similar conversations, the baroness suspected that the heart of Rosamund was sensible of the merits of count Dusseldorf, for she knew it was customary to deny a predilection of this sort, particularly when the gentleman had not declared a passion. Thus deluded, the baroness rejoiced in the probability of an event which would restore him to the ancient domains of his ancestors, and make him happy in the possession of a wife so highly gifted by nature and fortune as Rosamund of Brandenburgh.

The palace was now thronged with visitors, and was become the scene of continual diversified entertainment; and the princess Adelaide, before her departure for Dresden, had the pleasure to see her sister receive her numerous guests with smiles, enter with seeming avidity and satisfaction

into their amusements, and appear entertained by the lively sallies of the beautiful Rosamund.

The night previous to the commencement of her journey, the sisters had a private conference, in which Adelaide solemnly entreated the princess of Altenberg, as she valued the peace of her future life, to drop no hint to their fair cousin of those terrible suspicions which, convinced of the injustice of, she trusted she no longer cherished. "I take with me," continued the baroness, "this unfortunate child; but it is, dearest Frederica, with the fervid hope, that in a short time you will restore it your affection, and recall it to your own protection."

The parting of the affectionate sisters was a scene that affected the lively Rosamund to tears. The prince of Altenberg blessed and kissed the rosy Xavier, but he held the little Orilla to his bosom with those feelings known only to parents; while though she pressed her lips to its cheek and forehead, yet the kisses and blessings the age-

nized Frederica bestowed on her nephew came with far warmer sincerity from her heart.

Frederica gazed after the carriage that conveyed the baroness of Rosenheim from the palace with a look of indescribable agony; then clasping her white hands, said, "Adieu, my beloved Adelaide, my noble-minded sister! Heaven knows when or where we may meet again."

"Why, she comes to pass the ensuing winter at Dresden, does she not?" inquired Rosamund, wiping the tears from her eyes.

"Yes," answered the princess, "I hope, I trust she will; but who knows what accidents may prevent, what events may intervene."

"Defend me!" said Rosamund, endeavouring to laugh, "I am never industrious to conjure up unpleasant interventions; I rather choose to amuse my mind with agreeable probabilities; now, any reasonable creature, who saw your dejected manner, and doleful countenance, would actually

believe this was an eternal separation. instead of only for a few short months—one would think, Frederica, by the sorrow you express, that Adelaide was going to her grave instead of Rosenheim Castle, where her fond expecting husband waits with eager impatience, not to chide her for the delay I have occasioned, not for her absence from her duties, but from his caresses, which he lavishes upon her, his boy, and your Orilla. Come, come, no more of this grief: we shall soon hear from the travellers; you will be told that your Orilla rivals Xavier in the affection of the baron, who caresses your child."

"Oh, would to Heaven he did!" replied the princess, again bursting into tears; "I would to Heaven the baron Rosenheim did caress my child!"

"And most assuredly he will," resumed Rosamund; "you can have no doubt of the baron's affection for his niece."

"No," rejoined the princess, "certainly of that I can have no doubt; I am wrong to obtrude on you the anxious solicitude

of maternal feeling; pardon me, dear Rosamund; my spirits are weak; I lament the departure of my beloved Adelaide, the friend and sister of my heart."

"All this," replied the sprightly Rosamund, "is perfectly natural—I am sure I thought I should have broke my heart when I parted from the duchess, my mother, though I was sensible I was coming to dear friends, who would receive me with the warm welcome of affection; but you see I soon forgot my grief, though I fondly love my revered, indulgent parent, who never yet left a wish of her giddy Rosamund ungratified."

The baroness Rosenheim, fearing to fatigue the children, stopped, at the close of day, at a romantic village, where she purposed to remain the night, and pursue her journey on the following morning, when some hours of sleep had refreshed the little travellers. The sun had not yet set, and the evening being remarkably fine, she ordered refreshments on a lawn before the

gates of the inn, where she could herself inhale the balmy freshness of the air, and enjoy the prospect of the surrounding country, enriched by wide-spreading forests, and the sublime scenery of bold mountains, which seemed to stretch to the distant confines of Bohemia. Seated on a rude bench, the baroness, with her pencil, sketched a mountain view, while the children, attended by the servants, rolled their little limbs on the smooth mossy turf, and seemed delighted with the liberty they enjoyed. Tired of her pencil, and lost in thought, the baroness remained till the sun had set, reflecting on the strange prejudice her beloved sister had imbibed against her innocent child, and the equally strange suspicion that had possessed her mind respecting the person who had effected the change of the children, a suspicion so fatally rooted in her brain, that she feared it would for ever deprive the little Orilla of a mother's affection. Tears of pity for the disclaimed innocent dewed the lovely cheek of the baroness, who

mentally said, "Be it my care to supply to this dear unfortunate the loss of maternal tenderness; and, in the absence of her child, may the unhappy Frederica recover her tranquillity, and entirely forget the fearful apprehensions that now harrass her days!"

While occupied in retracing the events that had taken place while at Dresden, the baroness perceived not that a much larger portion of time had elapsed than she intended to remain in the open air; nor would her ideas then, perhaps, have returned to her own situation, had not a favourite spaniel, by licking her hand, recalled her thoughts from the wide excursion they were taking. She then inquired of the domestic, who waited at a distance, whether the attendants had returned with the children? Being answered in the negative, she felt considerable alarm, for the evening was growing dark, and her fancy began to conjure up ten thousand fears and dangers to which they might be exposed, from wandering out of their knowledge.

She was about to dispatch messengers after them, when voices were heard, and the baroness, faint with alarm, could plainly distinguish the cries of Orilla, almost amounting to screams. The trembling baroness hasted to meet them, and was shocked with the sight of the princess's nurse, to all appearance dead, in the arms of the male domestic who had gone with them.

Terrified beyond measure, the baroness received the screaming Orilla into her arms, while her own Xavier clung round her neck, and sobbing, hid his face on her bosom. In this situation they entered the inn, where, finding that she lived, every method was used to recover the nurse to animation and sense. It was long before the baroness could obtain an elucidation of the alarming scene before her; at length she learned, that, led on by the fineness of the evening, and the beauty of the path, they had wandered to a distance which induced the princess's nurse to propose their return, as supposing the baroness would feel alarm at their absence. They were then in

a dell, overhung with bushes of hurtleberries: treading unwarily on a stone, Isadora, the princess's nurse, twisted her ancle, and overcome with pain, sat down under a tree to recover herself, while they, keeping her in sight, walked to the bottom of the dell to gather nuts and berries.

"The princess Orilla," said Isadora, "was seated on the turf beside me, busily employed in plucking the flowers that grew near her, when suddenly a tall, meagre, sallow woman, in a strange outlandish habit, stood beside me, and pointing to the princess, demanded to whom the child belonged? Snatching the child to my arms, I replied, in terror, 'This child is the daughter of the prince of Altenberg.'

'Tis false,' rejoined the woman; 'Heaven, who eyes the actions of men, Heaven knows you utter a falsehood; the princess Frederica never bore that babe.'

"Then advancing close to me, she whispered in my ear, 'I am its mother; it was stolen from my arms by a man——

hush, hush; I must not, dare not breathe his name—no, I have sworn—I am bound in oaths never to divulge the name of that child's father.'

"I now," said Isadora, "was possessed with the dreadful notion of the woman being a maniac. Anxiously I turned my eyes to the spot where still remained my companions, in the hope that they would look towards me, and I might beckon them; but they were too much occupied; and I then offered the woman money, supposing she would leave me; but disdainfully pushing back my hand, she drew nearer to me; her long black hair hung matted over her face, through which gleamed her terrible eyes. 'What,' asked she, 'is the name of this child?' Fearing to irritate her by remaining silent, I answered, 'Orilla.'—'You are again mistaken,' said she; 'her name is Ulrica; she was baptized in my tears. You believe me poor—you are deceived—again I tell you this child is mine; restore her to my arms, and in exchange take this;' she drew from her bosom a

miniature picture; 'the gems,' continued she, 'which encircle this will enrich you; take them, be rich and happy—all the treasure I wish is my child.' Again I repeated, 'Woman, you are in an error; this child is the infant princess of Altenberg.' Regardless of what I said, she continued, 'I will fly with her where we will never more be heard of; I can bear to part from him, for he is no longer what he was, but my babe is dear to my heart.' She now made an effort to take the child from my arms; her looks were wild and mad; I strained the princess to my bosom, and endeavoured to persuade the maniac to depart. 'The night, my good woman,' said I, 'is coming on; you had better seek the shelter of your habitation.'—'I have wandered,' replied she, 'many times in the darkest hour of night to meet that child's father; nor did I hesitate to climb mountains, or cross wild heaths; for I have loved him—oh!' said she, with a harrowing groan, 'not with a common love: he was once all to me—world, friends, wealth,

happiness; but now the love I bore him centers in his child—he is ungrateful—all men are so; they flatter, vow, deceive, and abandon their victims to misery—but give me my child; before the morning dawns we must be far from hence; for should he find us, this bosom, which has so often pillowed his head, would crimson his dagger.' Again I prayed her to depart; but, with eyes flashing fire, she vehemently protested she would have her child: 'I will never part from it more,' said the maniac; 'we will live or die together.' Again she laid her hands on the princess, who, looking up, screamed with fear. 'My little angel,' said she, 'look on thy mother without terror—I was not always thus—come, though my flesh is wasted, there is still warmth enough in my bosom to cherish thee.' In spite of my struggles, she now dragged the princess from my arms and darted with her across the dell. My reiterated shrieks soon brought the rest of our people to my assistance; they pursued the woman, and by force rescued the

child, whom she tightly embraced, uttering frantic cries, and protesting the child was hers, her own Ulrica."

The baroness, who had listened, in almost breathless attention, to this narrative, at its conclusion asked what had become of the unhappy woman?

"Faint with struggling," replied Isadora, "she sunk on the earth, where, happy to be released from her outrages, we left her, for no doubt she is mad; and we thought ourselves well off to escape further mischief, which the wildness of her looks, and the madness of her discourse, seemed to threaten. For my part, I was so overcome by terror at losing, and joy at recovering the princess, that I fainted, and how I have been brought hither, Heaven only knows."

The baroness was long in soothing the terrified child, whom she determined no more to trust out of her sight; its nurse was too ill to take charge of it, and she resolved to have a bed prepared in the chamber appointed for herself, for the two

children, where, having carefully secured the door, she retired, not to sleep, but to reconsider every circumstance of this alarming adventure. Many times she wished she had herself seen and spoke with the woman, in whose language, as repeated by Isadora, there was an elevation above the vulgar. Her refusal of the money offered by Isadora, and possession of jewels, indicated a superior sphere of life. Could she be indeed the mother of the child? and was Frederica's asseverations and suspicions just? No, no, it was impossible; the unfortunate creature was a maniac, and uttered only the frantic suggestions of a distempered mind. Perhaps the death, or loss, of a tenderly-beloved infant, had turned her brain: still she wished she had seen her; she might have soothed her frenzied grief; she might have devised some scheme of future comfort for the unhappy being.

As often as the baroness sunk into momentary forgetfulness, the little Orilla would rouse her by a shriek, which plainly

demonstrated that the mind of the child was impressed with a terrific remembrance of the wretched maniac. Thus the hours of night wore away with the baroness, restless and uneasy.

In the morning the skin of the little princess felt dry and feverish, and her nurse was too much indisposed to proceed on the journey. The baroness, thus necessitated to remain at the village, determined, if possible, to obtain a sight of the maniac; on describing her, and inquiring of the persons who kept the inn, they declared they had never seen nor heard of such an object in their vicinity; that they knew of but one mad person, and that was a man who fancied himself an emperor, and gave away to his poor relations all the kingdoms in Europe, carrying fire and sword into distant nations, and believing he never was to be conquered; "but, alas! poor soul," continued the host, "if ever he should have an interval of reason, he will find he is nothing but the son of a farmer at last."

During the stay of the baroness at the village, where she was detained two days, by the indisposition of the little Orilla and her nurse, she employed her own male domestics, and the neighbouring peasants, in searching the mountains and adjacent forests; but no trace of the maniac remained; and she was at length, though unwillingly, compelled to relinquish the hope of finding her. No proof remaining, either to establish or invalidate the suspicions entertained by the princess of Altenberg respecting the child, the baroness strictly enjoined her retinue to observe inviolable silence on this adventure, denouncing her heavy and everlasting displeasure on the person who should hereafter presume to recall it to remembrance, either by gesture or word, this injunction appearing to the baroness as the only means of preserving her sister from the torturing knowledge of a circumstance which would too surely have strengthened the afflictive imagination already too firmly rooted, and tend to in-

crease her prejudice against the unfortunate innocent child. But though commanded to keep silence, it was utterly impossible to erase the memory of so strange an adventure from the minds of the attendants, who, joining together the circumstances they had before heard respecting the change of children, with the corroborating behaviour of the maniac, were themselves of the same decided opinion with the princess Frederica, that the little girl under their charge was, in reality, not the daughter of the prince of Altenberg, but an impostor.

Isadora, who had conversed with the woman, and had opportunity to examine her features, positively declared that the child resembled her; the dark hair, the complexion, the form of the face, were exact counterparts of her who had so solemnly protested she was her mother. Convinced that some extraordinary affair must have taken place to induce the princess of Altenberg, whose disposition was known to be mild and generous, to dismiss her attendants,

who had been so long about her person, particularly Richilda, who had lived with her from infancy, they sincerely rejoiced at their removal from the Meiningen palace, and going to a distant, and, they hoped, quiet Castle, where they might sleep in peace.

A few days brought the baroness to her home, and the arms of the anxiously-expecting baron, who, while he caressed his own Xavier, forgot not the little Orilla, who came endeared to his benevolent heart, from the afflictive circumstance of being disowned by her mother.

At Dresden, though all was gaiety, and one amusement succeeded another, in rapid variety, there were hearts in the Meiningen palace, as well as Frederica's, not absolutely at ease. Leopold felt all the inquietude of hopeless love, too sensible of the charms of Rosamund of Brandenburgh, while honour forbade his revealing the impression she had made; for having proposed her to count Dusseldorf, whose services yet remained unrewarded, he deter-

mined, whatever his own sufferings might be in bestowing her on another, never, by look or word, to betray his own feelings, or indicate the passion she had inspired.

Sigesmar's eyes confessed her beautiful, but he gazed without emotion; the awful events which had followed each other, since his fatal entrance into the world, with the heavy weight of guilt which pressed upon his soul, had given his spirits a gloomy solemnity, a brooding thoughtfulness, that rendered her unvarying gaiety irksome; for hers was the light bosom which vice had never tainted, nor misfortune wounded. The laughter her lively sallies and playful behaviour excited, wearied and annoyed him; his mind was no longer capable of deriving enjoyment from the elegant amusements in which Rosamund delighted, or of extracting pleasure from the accomplishments in which she excelled; his thoughts were dark, and the midnight storms, the howling wind, the deep roll of distant thunder, were more congenial with his mind than the richest melody of music;

the rocky defile, or wild and lonely heath, he preferred to the illuminated ball-room; for such savage scenes were in unison with his ferocious passions: in the wide world there was but one being on whom his eye rested with an emotion that partook of pleasure; his heart was yet sensible of the loveliness of Frederica, before whose superior beauty, Rosamund, in his idea, sunk into insignificance; excepting her, all the human race were objects of his hatred; yet his ambition prompted him to accept the hand of Rosamund, when offered, for with her he had been taught to expect the restoration of the Castle of Dusseldorf; and, possessed of her wealth, he might methodise those schemes which, in disjointed forms, crowded his guilty brain.

The generous, unsuspicious Leopold, stifling his own passion, had warmly and frequently recommended the count Dusseldorf to the notice and favour of his fair cousin; he had pointed out the fine expression of his face, the majestic proportion of his figure, and had dwelt with all

the energy of disinterested friendship on the rare endowments of his mind, and the well-proved bravery of his spirit.

After having patiently listened to what she considered a very tedious eulogium on the merits, personal and mental, of count Dusseldorf, Rosamund laughingly replied, "I must confess, Leopold, a bright eye is a charming object; but I wish always to see tenderness soften its splendor, otherwise I view it with the same admiration I do lightning, acknowledging its beauty, but trembling at its fire: in short, cousin, the meteor eyes of count Dusseldorf may astonish and terrify, but they will never charm me—then his majestic person I look up to with awe; it would be the height of temerity in a pigmy like me, to aspire to such a colossus; besides, Leopold," continued she, a crimson suffusion flashing over the snow of her face and bosom, "you know it is not impossible but I may already have disposed of my heart."

"Nay, my dear Rosamund, now you are

jesting," replied the prince, "for the duchess, your mother, has assured me——"

"Oh, you simpleton!" resumed Rosamund, "can you imagine I should chuse my mother for a confidant in an affair of the heart? besides, how know you but I have disposed of my affections since my arrival at Dresden?"

"It is not impossible, certainly," said the prince; "but I should hope——"

"You have my free permission," interrupted she, with peculiar emphasis, "to hope, on your own part, what is most favourable to your wishes, so that Altenberg and yourself give up the chimera of uniting me with your idol Dusseldorf. It befits the princely spirit of my family to reward his services; bestow on him what you please, nor will you find Rosamund of Brandenburgh backward in contributing to his advancement and happiness, in any way that does not involve her own."

Leopold took the white hand of his cousin—"Rosamund," said he, "I am little read in the ways of your sex; Fame re-

ports, you best know how justly, when a female says no, she means yes; where she most depreciates, she admires most; and where she affects to disdain, loves with the greatest tenderness: for once, be ingenuous, and teach my ignorance what it is to believe——"

"Believe," rejoined Rosamund, deeply blushing, "that Fame is a slanderer; that women are, by nature, far more sincere than men—at all events, believe me, when I solemnly and positively affirm, the count Dusseldorf possesses my grateful respect, but never was, never will be, the object of my choice."

"Here then," said the prince, "expires my cherished wish of uniting my fair cousin with a friend whose merits are above all praise; but for that other hint you gave, respecting having already disposed of your heart, how am I to understand?—say, Rosamund, were you indeed serious? will you condescend to enlighten me on this important point?"

"No," replied she, snatching away the hand he still held; "if you are not wilfully blind, there will be no difficulty in discovering——"

She stopped short; her eyes fell under his gaze, while a deeper crimson painted her glowing cheek.

"Leopold," continued she, endeavouring at composure, "you are very wrong to detain me thus, when you know that Frederica waits for me to attend her in her morning airing."

With the light step of a sylph, she vanished from the corporeal gaze of Leopold, but his mental vision still retained the form of loveliness; his thoughts dwelt on her blushes, the confusion of her manner, while hope whispered to his soul a thousand tender flatteries, which, till that moment, had never glanced upon his fancy. He now repented having mentioned the name of Rosamund to count Dusseldorf, though yet uncertain whether himself had been fortunate enough to create an interest in her heart.

Leopold had ever held his passions in subjection, and such was his friendship for Sigesmar, and the high sense of gratitude he entertained for the signal services he had rendered him, that he would willingly have sacrificed his own wishes and feelings to promote his interest and happiness; but he had no right to demand, or expect, an equal disinterestedness from Rosamund; independent even of the control of the duchess her mother, she could bestow her wealth and her person on whom she pleased. He had already urged her in favour of his friend, as far as delicacy would allow: his honour, his pledged and sacred promise, had demanded that he should so act; but Rosamund, in so important a point, was not to be influenced by the united persuasions of friendship; she, it appeared from her own declaration, had already disposed of her heart. All then that remained for him to do was, to restore immediately, with all proper forms, the domain of Dusseldorf to its lineal heir, and leave the count at liberty to select a bride,

whose heart should acknowledge the grand organization of his mind, and homage the majestic construction of his towering form.

The night following this resolve, a magnificent entertainment was given at the palace, in honour of the anniversary of the birth of Leopold. The count Dusseldorf had never learned to dance; he considered it a frivolous amusement, and wondered how men of sense could play the antic, and degrade their dignity, by mingling in effeminate sports calculated merely for the diversion of weak-minded women; and it was with no small degree of impatience he remained a spectator in the crowded ball-room; but when he observed Rosamund of Brandenburgh select Leopold for her partner in the voluptuous waltz, to whom she clung with looks beaming tenderness, and a manner expressive of more pleasure than the giddy movement of the dance could possibly inspire, a jealous suspicion was awakened, that the prince, instead of preferring his suit with

his fair relation, had artfully ingratiated himself into her good favour, regardless of his own voluntary promise pledged to him, and forgetful of the blessings he enjoyed in the preservation of his sister, through the bravery of his arm.

As these thoughts darted on the brain of Sigesmar, a darker frown lowered on his brow, while his meteor eyes followed, with flaming scrutiny, every look and motion of the graceful pair, who, with happy thoughtlessness of all, save the happiness of enfolding each other, were moving through the mazy velocity of the dance.

At its conclusion, he beheld Rosamund sink on her seat, her head, in melting languishment, reclining on the shoulder of Leopold, whose panting breath fanned the golden ringlets of her hair. Dusseldorf did not love Rosamund, but yet he was sensible of an envious feeling, that impelled him towards the canopy under which they were seated. Before he could approach, the prince had resigned his place to his sister; the eyes of Sigesmar were

still directed to the canopy, though he was stopped at some distance from it, by the questions of a gentleman, who had passed his arm through his. Presently he saw Leopold return, whom he had lost for a few moments, bearing a goblet, which Rosamund smilingly raised to her lips. The count then hastily withdrew his arm from his troublesome companion, and arrived just in time to see Rosamund take a rose from her hair, which, presenting to her cousin, she bade him keep as a reward. He saw Leopold kiss the rose, and place it in his bosom, but the reply he was about to make was silenced by the approach of Dusseldorf, while his countenance, encountering his glance, was dyed with the deep hue of crimson.

Ten thousand execrations hung on the lip of Dusseldorf, but he suppressed them, for he remembered that public indignation, and open expression of resentment, were forbade by the laws of the *Secret Avengers*. His hand had grasped the dagger he constantly wore in his bosom, but an instanta-

neous determination flashed on his soul, that bade the steel rest; while a smile of deceptive treachery curled the ripe coral of his lip, as he constrained himself to address some compliments to Rosamund, on the beauty of her appearance, and the graceful agility of her dancing.

Rosamund had certainly never looked to more advantage; her dress was becoming, and displayed, while it adorned, the symmetry of her fairy figure. The exercise she had been engaged in had considerably heightened the rich carnation of her cheek, and her blue eyes sparkled with the double satisfaction of being pleased, and the consciousness of pleasing.

In reply to the count, she asked, "Do you never dance?"

"No, madam," was the reply.

"Do you not love music?" resumed Rosamund.

"I once fancied I did," answered Sigesmar, "but experience has since taught me I have no taste for these refinements."

"Wonderful!" thought Rosamund, "never dance!—no taste for music!"

"And you, madam," resumed Dusseldorf, "do you not suffer great fatigue? does not your head ach, from the giddy whirl of the waltz?"

"On the contrary," replied she, gaily; "I have an inclination on tiptoe, and a hand ready to join the groups who are now forming, for any gentleman who shall think me a partner worth entreating."

"I lament my want of knowledge in this intricate science," said the count, "or I would gratefully accept so fair a challenge."

"I, then," said Leopold, "am at liberty to solicit."

"My offer," rejoined Rosamund, "precludes the necessity of solicitation."

Saying this she placed her hand in his, with a smile so bewitching, that, thrown off his guard by the fascination of the action, Leopold raised it to his lips.

The blood of Dusseldorf boiled in his

veins; nor was his rancour lessened when, springing from the canopy, she said, "Adieu, my lord count; if you wish for the smiles and approbation of my sex, initiate yourself, without delay, in the mazes of the dance, and teach your soul to be sensible of the entrancing melody of sweet sounds."

For a moment Sigesmar stood motionless and silent, then pursuing with a dark frown the retreating Rosamund, gnashing his teeth, he exclaimed, "Shall this be forgotten?"

The company had formed themselves into sets, and with looks and spirits attuned to hilarity, were tripping the fantastic measures of the dance; the count Dusseldorf had fancied himself alone, but on turning towards the canopy, he perceived the princess Frederica observing him, with the mingled expression of terror and surprise depicted on her countenance.

Aware of the imprudence of his exclamation, he endeavoured to redeem his error, by dissembling calmness; while ad-

dressing the princess, he said, "The lovely lady Rosamund gives most excellent counsel, which I will speedily profit by, at least I will endeavour to attain perfection in those accomplishments which she considers necessary to conciliate female regard."

The specious turn of this speech did not deceive the princess; her heart beat with apprehension; for on her alarmed fancy his incautious exclamation had sounded a menace, and she felt her frame thrill with horror at the idea of the revenge he might, even at the moment his dark features wore a smile, be meditating.

Nearly unconscious of what she uttered, she replied, "My volatile cousin, my lord count, speaks without reflection; she is young, and hitherto has met no unhappiness to check the exuberance of her spirits; but be assured, she meant not to give you offence by expressing a dislike——"

"Of me," interrupted the count, "whom a secluded education has deprived of the accomplishments that win a woman's favour."

"You mistake, count," resumed the princess; "Rosamund's design was to express——"

"Her entire approbation of the prince of Meiningen," said Sigesmar. "I beg your highness to accept my warm thanks for this explanation, which I shall profit by, teaching, in future, my ambition to be less aspiring."

Frederica was now aware of the indiscretion of her speech, and would have palliated; but Dusseldorf, bowing with affected sorrow and humility, begged her to spare apology; again repeated his thanks that she had condescended to remove the veil from his eyes, and withdrew, leaving the agitated princess to explain and apologise to Rosamund for the error she had so unintentionally committed.

An opportunity of doing this did not occur till the next morning, when, carefully disguising her own prejudice against him, she exerted her utmost eloquence to recommend count Dusseldorf to her cousin as a man worthy the honour of her hand,

and approved by the warm wishes of her family.

For a few moments the ingenuous Rosamund sat absorbed in reflection, while Frederica, with a beating heart, mentally prayed she might reject him. At length Rosamund said, "It is a painful feeling to be obliged to negative the united wishes of relatives so respected and beloved; yet, repugnant as I am to disappoint their hopes, every honourable principle demands that I should do it, for never can I behold the man they have selected and approve, but with sensations that must annihilate love. Having thus decidedly expressed my rejection of this alliance, I trust I shall never again be urged upon so disagreeable a subject, and that you, my dear Frederica, will convey my unalterable resolution of never being the wife of count Dusseldorf, to every branch of the family; but, in particular lose no time in acquainting Leopold."

"To Leopold in particular!" echoed the princess, looking archly on her blushing cousin; "I shall certainly be particular

in conveying to him your rejection of count Dusseldorf."

"It is, undoubtedly, a most mortifying circumstance to be necessitated," continued Rosamund, "to speak first, especially to a female not absolutely frightful, nor altogether despicable in other more essential points; the delicacy of friendship may, indeed, in this peculiar case, restrain the prince of Meiningen, and this consideration emboldens me to break the shackles imposed by the tyranny of custom on our sex, and declare to you unsolicited, unwooed, that unless the bride of Leopold of Meiningen, I, Rosamund of Brandenburgh, now in my nineteenth year, do most seriously resolve, and solemnly vow, to die a virgin."

"Here, then," said Leopold, (who had entered the apartment, unseen of Rosamund,) throwing himself at her feet, "here do I, Leopold of Meiningen, in my twenty-fifth year, seriously resolve, and most solemnly vow, to take for my bride Rosamund of Brandenburgh, and to adore her

as sovereign mistress of my affections as long as we both shall live."

Rosamund shrieked, but not with terror or disgust; then throwing herself on the neck of the princess, burst into tears. Frederica, gently disengaging herself from her embrace, placed the blushing, confused maid in the extended arms of her enraptured brother, who, with the prevailing rhetoric of love, while he confessed his grateful sensibility of her preference, succeeded in restoring her agitated spirits to composure.

The delighted Frederica, released from the apprehension of an alliance with the detested Dusseldorf, congratulated the happy lovers in terms of the sincerest pleasure. "May Heaven," said she, fervently, "smile propitious on the union of these attached hearts, and grant that the felicity of their marriage be interrupted by no deep laid scheme of revenge, treachery, or imposition!"

Leopold turned an inquiring eye on his

sister; but the entrance of Altenberg gave a turn to his thoughts, and he being informed of what had taken place, considered it best that himself should be the bearer of the tidings to Sigesmar, who, disappointed of the hand of Rosamund, would, no doubt, be anxious to quit Dresden: "He shall go to take possession," said Leopold, "of the domain of Dusseldorf."

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